

Are the Padanians a nation?

- Lega Nord and Nationalism in Italy -

Silvio Martinelli
Master's Thesis
University of Jyväskylä
Faculty of Social Sciences
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- 2. Author:** Silvio Martinelli
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7. Summary:

This thesis' **purpose** is to contribute to the debate on nationalism and particularly to the understanding of nations. The **focus** is on a relatively new nationalist movement called Lega Nord. Its case is presented and tested against the theoretical framework built in the first section of the thesis. This paper briefly presents the development of the concept of nation since its origins. However, the main object of the study, Lega Nord, is mainly placed in recent days, particularly from 1979 to present.

In terms of **research methods**, this thesis is mainly theoretical and does not include empirical research. It uses the existing abundant literature on nationalism to provide an overview of the topic and builds its own theoretical framework and a working definition of nation. The latter is influenced by the author's studies and professional experience in themes related to culture. In the case study part, this paper mainly uses primary sources produced by Lega Nord to describe the movement's development. The analysis builds on the theoretical tools illustrated in the first section.

This thesis suggests two sets of **conclusions**. With regards to the theory, it suggests that nations should be seen as identity groups, therefore placing much emphasis on the question of identity, particularly on group identity. It also proposes a nation-building centred approach: to understand a particular nation, one should study it in relation to the nation building process implemented by the nationalist movement that promotes a particular nation. General elements of nation building process are proposed in the paper. With regards to the case of Lega Nord, this thesis concludes that it is indeed a nationalist moment that has been engaged in a nation building process to produce and reinforce the group identity of a targeted population, called for the purpose 'Padanians'. The study of Lega Nord also supports Hobsbawm's theory stating that national identification can shift quickly in time. It also provides some elements to speculate on the possible future of Lega Nord and its nationalist ideas in Italy. Finally, this thesis **recommends** to use an interdisciplinary approach to the study of nations, particularly to emphasising team building processes and consequently aspects studied in disciplines such as education, social psychology and practices used in training. For those interested in a further study on the topic, this paper recommends to carry out an empirical research, in particular to interview a sample population of northern Italy (target population for Lega Nord) at two different points of time.

- 8. Key words:** nationalism, nation, Italy, Lega Nord, Northern League, culture

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Foreword

Nowadays, ‘Life Long Learning’ is quite a popular concept, used by many institutions as one of their main educational policies. If I calculate the time since I started thinking about a thesis, I realise that 3 years of my life have been involved in this process. And I can also say with total confidence that it has been quite a learning experience. It is true that during most of this time I have been occupied with my professional life, but the thesis has been always in the back of my mind. This has helped me improve not only the traditional academic skills, but also important life ‘tools’ such as stress management, self-motivation and time management.

Parallels between the writing a thesis and nurturing your own child have often been done. And indeed it has been very much so up to the point that the thesis document seems to live its own life and becomes increasingly difficult to manage it. There are many things that now, in retrospect, I would have done differently, but it seems to be almost impossible to make any radical change without destroying the creation and starting all over again.

A few people have been around contributing in different ways to make this happen. Particularly I would like to thank my partner, Nina, who has been supporting me for both this and my B.A. thesis, pushing me forward (especially in moments of low motivation), but also going through the documents with her particular skill of identifying a lot of important details that are invisible to me. Thanks also to Dario, my competent younger brother, who at much faster pace than me has already finished his PhD. He has provided me with important comments and encouragements at strategic periods of time. My parents too, many thousands kilometres away, have been very patient in waiting for this promised but ever lasting enterprise, without adding any pressure to the process.

Special thanks go my supervisor, Marja Keranen, who has been kind, competent and supportive, without ever allowing me to lose ownership of the study. She often told me to reflect, rather than telling me what to do. Last, but not least, I would like to thank my recent Canadian friend, Elizabeth Nash, who not only proofread the whole text, but also encouraged me in the final phase with her ever happy style.

Section I: What is a nation?

1. Introduction

We have made Italy, now we need to make the Italians¹

Two centuries ago, after the kingdom of Piedmont had unified most of what is now called Italy, the statesman Cavour was probably justifiably worried about the actual existence of an Italian nation and the need to take action to form one. In the past two decades Italy has experienced the rise of a movement, Lega Nord (LN), promoting the independence of the northern area of the country. LN referred to this area as Padania, and Padanians are its people. The achievements of Lega Nord at its peak were striking. In a few years time the main towns and regions of the northern Italy were governed by its elected representatives (for example Milan in 1993, with 57% of the votes or Varese with almost 70%). On the national scale, LN reached 10% at the polls in 1996 and almost 20% in 1994 in joint list with Forza Italia, the party founded by Silvio Berlusconi which at present is the largest in Italy. Albeit not recognized in Italy and abroad, LN has established a Parliament of Padania, an unarmed police force, a flag, an anthem, and other symbols typical of nationhood.

Asking the question "Are the Padanians a nation?" provides an the opportunity to explore the major issues connected to the concept of nationhood. In fact, if asked this question, ordinary Italian citizens will probably provide a mixed reaction. In this paper, the often taken-for-granted assumption that Italians are just one nation will be questioned. Many would choose a historical investigation in order to ascertain whether the Padanians as a nation had existed before. Some may dismiss the LN phenomenon as purely demagogical with no need to be seen as part of a nation-building exercise. Others might be more doubtful. It is among the latter that I place myself at the start of this intellectual journey in which various islands of knowledge will be visited, in the perhaps too ambitious attempt of solving this enigma. I hope to shed some light on the LN case and contribute to the very important debates in which many scholars on nationalism are currently engaged.

This thesis is divided into two sections. The first explores the concept of nation and attempts a broad picture of the subject in addition to some analytical tools to be used in the second section. It is in the second part that the case of Lega Nord and Padania is to be examined in detail and conclusions are drawn.

¹ Famous sentence of C.B. di Cavour. Author's translation.

2. Aim, relevance and method of analysis of this research

The objective of this thesis is to contribute to the debate on nationalism, particularly as far as the concept of nation is concerned. Indeed, *nation* is one of the most discussed and yet unresolved concepts in political science as well as in other disciplines such as history, sociology and anthropology. It involves the use of very complex concepts such as identity, ethnicity and culture. Dealing with this concept necessitates examining historical, social and political developments. Most importantly, it is an idea which is so internalised in our daily lives that an objective assessment becomes very difficult for everyone.

Consenting or not, everyone is generally supposed to be part of a nation, normally an established nation-state. In Europe, for example, we have the Germans, the French, the Italians, the Russians, the Spanish, and so on, or do we? A person from Barcelona may well oppose this classification and claim to be part of the Catalan nation and dispute the actual existence of the Spanish nation. Perhaps it would be said that Catalans have always existed, since they have a different language, culture, history, etc. Have they always existed? What justifies the existence of a nation? And of nations at all?

An answer to these questions, not only in relation to the Catalans of course, is needed in order to come to a working definition of nation such is the aim of this section which will help find tools to answer the main question of this thesis: Are the Padanians a nation? Unfortunately, I can say it from the outset, there will not be one single answer. Scholars are divided enough to make it impossible to put forward a definition that would satisfy everyone. However, I shall consider the various arguments and suggest one that will be tested in the second section against the case of Lega Nord.

Methodologically I have chosen to use the relevant literature on the topic and one case study, the separatist movement of Lega Nord that has been operating in Italy for the past 20 years.

The literature has been gathered from what my studies at the University of Tampere and Jyväskylä, from information offered by Eric Zuelow (2001) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an international committee of experts through their special website called 'the nationalist project'. I then searched for cross-references. My aim has been to include all of the most recognised scholars in the field and a few of the lesser known, but with interesting insights. Due to limited resources, accessibility and the size of this paper, a number

of interesting contributions have been left out, most notably, the basic philosophical tenants on nation of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, whose ideas are only indirectly reflected in this work. Moreover, references are restricted to European and North American authors, who mainly deal with experiences in their regions, or from a Western perspective. Therefore, both the analysis and its outcome are applicable to a limited geo-political context, which in this case is acceptable considering that the case Lega Nord is part of this context.

In structuring the presentation of the schools of thought, I deliberately decided to rename the more classic classification proposed by Anthony D. Smith (1994). This important scholar suggested four schools of thought: the nationalists, the perennialists, the modernists and post-modernists, excluding himself from any of these. I found the name of the first category problematic, as a nationalist thinker may or may not be part of this as well as the other categories, depending on his/her own belief and on how nationalism is finally defined. There is also another classic division between primordialism and constructivism (or modernism). I found also this classification problematic as the word primordialism is too restrictive to include the wide range of critics to the constructivist/modernist school, from the traditional nationalists to the postmodernists.

Far from attempting a complete review of the topic, I have tried to focus on specific points and present the scholars' ideas in a form of a dialogue on the main issues. In this way I intend to provide a general picture of the current debates on the topic, particularly highlighting the issues of contention and the basic elements of agreement. Given the high level of disagreement among authors, I have tried to depart from the basics and approach the topic from my own perspective, taking a stand in certain cases and adopting the 'minimum common denominator' of the scholars in other cases. I have chosen to use a working definition of nation and a small theoretical framework that explains it. Rather than adopting a definition proposed by any of the scholars reviewed, I preferred to propose my own as none seemed to fully fit my approach to the topic. In particular, in other works I have reviewed the concepts of identity and culture and their relation to the one of nation, when properly discussed, have been approached quite differently from the way I would do. My academic and professional background in intercultural studies has led me to take a slightly different approach than most mainstream scholars. Indeed, this was one of the first interesting findings in this research.

I have considered the definition of nation, and all the related theory, as a hypothesis to be used to analyse the case of Lega Nord. As a nationalist movement, Lega Nord has been presented with a historical excursus from its origins until April 2002, using mainly LN's own sources such as the party magazine, speeches, a commercially sold cd-rom collection of important documents and different internet sources. I did consider it important, nor desirable, to verify LN's data with independent sources for two reasons. Firstly, although some numbers (such as participation in an event) or the tone can be exaggerated, most information I have used is primary data, often quoted from independent sources by LN itself, such as electoral data, names or dates of events. Secondly, LN a contemporary phenomenon, is subject to high emotional involvement and therefore it is difficult to find reliable independent sources. I preferred to take a clearly one-sided account, rather than a falsely objective one. It can be seen as a sort of interview, with LN describing its 'life' through its own documents.

Finally, after the time-lined presentation of LN, I have integrated the events of the development of LN into the theoretical framework built in the first section of this thesis, in order to test the framework. The results should be judged by the readers of this paper. Certainly, the scope of this research is limited by several factors, such as not being able to carry out an empirical research through interviewing a sample of 'Padanians' at two different points of time, and not having had the possibility to study certain concepts in social psychology.

A final point should be made regarding my possible emotional involvement in the issue. For many, national affiliation is something that is deeply felt and is one's own identity, therefore often making research biased. As I lived the first 22 years of my life in Southern Italy and three in Rome, it is only legitimate to suspect that my approach to the subject is also biased, especially as this thesis refers to a movement from the north of Italy that aims to separate the country. However, I feel I have been able to observe the case analytically. As many people who have lived in Italy, I am not particularly attached to the country or the Italian nation and, in principle, I am neither against, nor in favour of dividing Italy into two or more territories. I have lived abroad for over 7 years now and have limited contacts with Italy and the Italians. In my opinion, this has allowed me to observe Lega Nord and nationalism with curiosity rather than passion. Furthermore, as a positive research aspect, I have the advantage of having lived, until 1995, in Italy, having followed the daily development of Lega Nord.

3. The term nation

3.1 Clarification on terminology

Before entering any serious debate on nations, it is important to define the meanings of the related key concepts. While reading the books of different scholars, I have that it is common to see the same words assigned to different meanings. Also, it was disappointing to see how concepts such as identity or culture are often used by not defined even though their meaning is not at all univocal. I believe this contributes to disagreement and confusion surrounding the concepts of nation and nationalism.

Listed below are a number of key-concepts that in my opinion, if not defined, can be sources of misunderstandings while reading the remainder of the paper. I do not attempt to define these concepts, but only to select the meaning I want to attribute to each word.

State is often used as a synonymous of nation. In this paper, state is only referred to as an institutional apparatus and in no way is related to a population. The modern state, based on the famous principle of division of powers, is made up of legislative, judiciary and executive organs. These organs, therefore the state, are responsible over a certain population and territory. The nation, however defined, refers to people, not to institutions. When I mention a *nation-state* I refer to a real or hypothetical situation where the state's population is made of one nation. Consequently, a *multinational state* would be comprised of more than one nation.

Contrary to many authors², I use the term *nationality* to refer only to the legal status of a person, sometimes referred to as citizenship. According to the number of different passports one is entitled to receive, a person assume one or more nationalities. There are a very limited number of stateless people, who for various reasons may not receive recognition of their nationality. In other words nationality is the relation that legally links a state to each citizen, attributing a number of rights and duties to this individual. Needless to say, a person may or may not feel part of a nation, but may still hold that nationality. A person may also lose or acquire nationalities. In short, nationality is not directly linked with identity or one's perception of another's national belonging. Moreover, in cases of multinational states, people will hold only one passport and therefore have only one nationality.

² See for example Smith (1986), Miller (1985), Galli della Loggia (1996).

Directly linked to nationality is the concept of *citizen* and *national*, used here almost synonymously. A national is a person holding a particular nationality. Therefore, a French national, is a person holding (or able to obtain) a French passport. One may well be of Algerian origin and have changed nationality only a month earlier, but s/he has a French passport is a French national. S/he is also a citizen. However, this concept puts more emphasis on ownership of duties and rights as a consequence of being part of a specific polity, this being a state, nation-state or something else. For example, there is much legislative and political work on the official recognition of a European (Union) citizen, even though the European Union is not defined as a state.

Connected with nationality are the terms *national consciousness* or *awareness*. In place of these terms, I prefer to use *national identity*. In my understanding, the former assume the actual existence of a nation, referring to a person 'discovering' or being conscious to be part of an existing nation. As we shall see, a number of scholars agree that the term nation is more of an imagined or constructed community. The concept of identity instead fits well with both real and constructed concepts.

Ethnicity is one of the most important concepts used in conjunction with nation and nationalism. Some authors make it a central point of their theory. In fact, although it reminds us of a more ancient meaning than nation, this is a modern concept. According to Hobsbawm (1992:160) *Ethnie* (from French) was recorded on *Trésor de la Langue Francaise* (vol. VIII, Paris 1980) only in 1896, but was not in use before 1956.

Anthony D. Smith, in the Ethnic Origins of Nations, uses the term extensively, but clearly regards it as a French neologism not yet fully anglicised. I doubt whether it can be found, except freakishly, in the discussion of nationality before the late 1960. (Hobsbawm 1992: 160)

I subscribe to Hobsbawm's position that a "genetic approach to ethnicity is plainly irrelevant" and prefer to regard *Ethnic groups* as a cultural form of social organisation. The recognition of common identity, cultural ties and some common physical traits will be the distinguishing principles for ethnic groups. Common origin and descent will not be included in the use of this term.

By *patriotism*, I assume the common view which refers to a sort of devotion or affection to the community one identifies with. As many scholars assume³, patriotism has always existed, or at least it is as old as the first form of communities. It is therefore not a function of nations or nationalism.

Besides *nation*, the other three key concepts I have identified are *nationalism*, *culture* and *identity*. They will all be treated more extensively in the course of the paper.

3.2 History of the term nation

In this chapter I will illustrate the way in which the term *nation* has evolved. This is to be differentiated from the history of nations as political or cultural entities. At the present level of debate, it is much easier to find consensus on what the word nation has meant, at least in certain languages over the centuries, than to agree on when nations have started to exist and how they have evolved.

To start with, the modern usage of the term *nation* in English as well as in its direct translation in other European languages is very recent. Depending on different authors, the term was firstly used between the 16th century⁴ and the 18th century⁵. Only then this word began to be understood in a similar way as we understand it today.

In fact, the origin of the word itself comes, as often, from Latin. *Natio* can be translated as 'something born', or its equivalent verb *nasci* as 'to be born'. The Romans, in ordinary speech, used the word *natio* to indicate a group of people belonging together by similarity of birth, bigger than a family, but definitely smaller than a people. Therefore within the Roman empire existed the *Populus Romanus* not the *Natio Romanorum* (Kedourie 1993).⁶

During the Middle Ages the European universities and the catholic church used the word *nation* for technical and organisational purposes. The University of Paris, for example, had divisions in four nations: *Nation de France*, which included speakers of Romance languages (incl. also what are now known as Italians or Spaniards), *Nation de Picardie* (for the Dutch),

³ See for example Kamenka (1973: 23).

⁴ See for example Greenfeld (1992: 6), when he argues that it was then that the word nation changes its meaning from "an elite" to a synonymous of "people".

⁵ For example Hobsbawm (1992:3).

Nation de Normandie (for those from the North-East) and *Nation de Germanie* (for those from present day England and Germany). Once in the studies were finished, students would switch back to their original national identities. Moreover, for the church council nation indicated a community of opinion coming from a certain region.⁷

Other uses of nation were made by Machiavelli, who spoke of Ghibelline and Guelf nations (two factions in Florence, the former following the emperor, the latter the pope), Dante, who spoke of *nazione milanese* or *fiorentina* (from Florence or Milan), Montesquieu who refers to Monks as the pietistic nation, etc. (Kedourie 1993).

Most authors refer to the French revolution as the historical event that began to shape the term nation closer to today's meaning. But here disagreement starts to mount. Greenfeld, for example, argues that from the 16th century the English were associating the word nation to 'people' and therefore had reached the modern sense of the word.

As for the associated term of nationalism, it is reported to have been used first in 1774 by Herder (Hechter 2000). It became a fully-fledged doctrine in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century (Kedourie 1993).

A preliminary, partially conclusive point from this chapter is that the word nation has had different meanings in different times and places. Moreover, if nations existed before 16th-18th century, then they were not named nations, but referred to in another manner.

⁶ Greenfeld (1992:12) reports instead that *natio* refers to "foreigners coming from the same geographical region with lower status" (vs. Roman citizens).

⁷ Other universities doing similar divisions were Prague and Aberdeen. For further reference see for example Kamenka (1973), Kedourie (1993) or Greenfeld (1992).

4. The main schools of thought

4.1 The 'traditional' nationalist concept of nation

According to my research, the arguments I will present in this chapter are not discussed in recent scientific literature. However, I believe the following concepts are the ones most often referred to by ordinary people and even many leading politicians when thinking about nations and nationalism. Moreover, some of the concept I will illustrate are the ones used as prototypes by scholars to describe the phenomenon of nationalist thinking.

According to the traditional nationalists, humanity is naturally, or godly, divided into nations. A population belongs to a nation from its birth for, presumably, the rest of human history. Each nation has the right to live in, and should be sovereign over, its 'homeland'. Each nation can be recognised by certain objective characteristics such as language, religion, culture and, sometimes, physical traits. A nation's main foundation is its history, including its mythology and its glorious as well as its dramatic times.

In fact, at first glance, this traditional approach perhaps represents the most spontaneous thinking of most people, at least as far as nations are concerned (nationalism, on the contrary, is often associated with negative past and present ideologies carrying its name). Seldom is a nation's reason to exist questioned. It is a just a 'natural thing' in this world! Rarely would one instinctively see his/her nation as a human creation, of a temporal existence. Principles such as self-determination or overriding 'national interest' are acclaimed and rarely disputed principles in international politics⁸.

This is not something that came out of the blue. Several writers and political activists were engaged in theorizing this ideology. Giuseppe Mazzini is often cited as one of the main contributors. His definition of nation was: "a larger or smaller aggregate of human beings bound together into an organic whole by agreement in a certain number of real particulars, such as race, physiognomy, historic tradition, intellectual peculiarities, or active tendencies". "The Nation as a divine design which evil governments have disfigured". If arrangements of

⁸ However, these are now under threat from the right to stop "crimes against humanity". The recent establishment of the international tribunal in Rome as well as the many instances of wars carried out under the "authorization" of the UN Security Council in Yugoslavia or Iraq, are examples of serious limitations to what were previously undisputed principles.

Congress of Vienna were overthrown, then humanity would be divided into sovereign nations and liberty would prevail (Kedourie 1993: 101).

Another important author is Ernest Renan, a French theorist who, back in 1882, delivered a lecture in a form of essay at the Sorbonne in Paris on "What is a nation". He saw two principles, one lying in the past and one in the present. The former refers to "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories", the latter to the "present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form"⁹. Renan was aware that nations are not eternal and as everything in history, they have a beginning and will end. Already then, well before the formation of the EU or other European institutions, he was thinking that a European confederation would be the future. However, Renan saw the existing nations as justified by a common past and as something substantially 'natural' although under threat from "wills that are often none too enlightened" (Kedourie 1993: 101).

It is important to underline that these authors, as well as others, were greatly influenced by the triumph of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, which signified liberation from old monarchies whose legitimacy derived directly from God. Already then there existed 'enlightened' kings such as Frederick the Great of Prussia in 1779, who is reported to have said that the "love for the fatherland is a rational sentiment". Then the French revolution introduced new ideas: "The principle of sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation; no body of men, no individual, can exercise authority that does not emanate expressly from it". (Kedourie 1993: 4-5)

Another definition that is often used to summarise the traditional nationalist position is the one expressed later, in 1912, by Joseph Stalin. A nation "is a historically evolved, stable community of language territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture" (quoted in Hobsbawm 1992:5). This is again an 'objective' definition emphasizing the importance of language and culture.

In summary, traditional concepts of nation and nationalism are defined in a form of objective definitions, often finding legitimacy in divine designs or the nature of human beings. There is little space for rational answers, the existence of nations is something taken for granted and

⁹ in Eley, Geoff and Sunym Ronald Grigor (1996: 52).

the existence of nationalism is considered to be necessary and positive. So positive that it is often associated with the idea of democracy.

4.2 The Modernist school - Gellner, Hobsbawm and Anderson

The so-called modernists are certainly among the most influential scholars on the subject of nationalism. In fact, some of their advocates might be best placed under the Marxist, Instrumentalist or generally Constructivist labels. However, they all seem to have originated from or have something in common with the work of Ernest Gellner since 1983.

As the word suggests, the main move from the traditional nationalist authors is the suggestion that nations are modern phenomena, born in the aftermath of the French revolution and that they seem to have first appeared in Europe.¹⁰ Nations did not exist before that and this has clear historical explanations. Furthermore, nations were a creation, or better said a construction, of nationalism. The following chapters will explain why.

4.2.1 The path of Gellner

Gellner's classic argument, adopted by many others, is that the industrial revolution and subsequent urbanisation created the need to replace the traditional cultures and forms of identities with new ones. People of different backgrounds were converging in industrial cities from various places, often speaking different languages or dialects with developed, but different, local identities. For both these people and their rulers, a need arose to develop a new identity and ways to communicate and relate to one another. Selectively choosing, or even inventing, a common past helped achieving new identities. Other important aspects were the enforcement of common languages and adoption of common cultural symbols and rituals. (Gellner 1983)

Subsequently, one may jump to the conclusion that forms of nationalism and nation formation would occur in any circumstances where a relatively large movement of people is at stake. Gellner explains the specific reasons of why new national identities were formed during the industrial revolution. He refers to a change in the role of culture. "The prime role of culture in

¹⁰ As I have mentioned, I will not enter into the question on whether nations and nationalism are European-borne phenomena. It is however useful to highlight that some scholars would dispute that. See for example Chatterjee (1993).

agrarian society was to underwrite peoples status and peoples identity. Its role was to embed their position in a complex, usually hierarchical and relatively stable structure" (Gellner 1996:368). On the contrary, in the modern world people have no stable position or structure. Family associations are increasingly loose. Due to this situation, people feel the need to be part of a different culture, what Gellner calls 'high culture' and defines it as "literate codified culture which permits context-free communication" (ibid.). In other words, the state's mass culture, using mass media, such as the printed press and more recently television, is a culture that needs the creation or reaffirmation of a common language, symbols, and past.

Gellner relies heavily on this concept of high culture, affirming that if a person is not accepted in, or cannot master, the "culture of the surrounding economic, political and educational bureaucracies" (ibid.), then s/he is under continuous humiliation and becomes a nationalist.

What is nationalism according to Gellner? It is "primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" (Gellner 1999:1)¹¹. With this definition and the whole discourse summarised above, Gellner states that "Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent [...] political destiny, are a myth; nationalism which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: *that is reality*" (Gellner 1999:48-49). In other words, nationalism creates nations. They do not exist before nationalism; their history, being there or not, is as inessential as a navel after birth.¹²

4.2.2 Anderson's imagined community

In my view, Gellner certainly succeeded in paving the way for understanding nations as modern phenomena, but did not quite succeed in providing a clear definition of a nation. Rather, he focussed on nationalism, as the precondition to nations. However, Benedict Anderson, instead, provides a very clear definition that is one of the most quoted in the literature. A nation is:

An imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign
(Anderson 1991: 6)

¹¹ This definition finds its origins in a similar, but much older formulation by John Stuart Mill (1861: 291-2).

In fact, virtually all communities, with possible exception of those based on face-to-face relations, are, in Anderson's cultural constructivist view, imagined communities. These communities are to be distinguished not on the basis of being real or false, but on the style in which they are imagined. In accordance with Gellner, Anderson does not believe that nations are something natural or objective; on the contrary they are created and imagined in people's minds. Again, one could immediately ask where lies the modernity of nations. This becomes clear through an explanation of the various terms, especially the one of sovereignty, utilised in the above mentioned definition.

First of all a nation is a *community*, in the sense that whatever actual inequality may exist, it is conceived as a 'horizontal comradeship', e.g. among the Hungarians, no one is more Hungarian than another. This is the aspect that makes members of a nation so strong, for good and bad. People are ready to die for their 'brothers'. The second keyword used by Anderson is: *limited*. A nation cannot exist without other nations. It is an in-group situation reflected through the relation of inclusion/exclusion. Finally, and probably the most distinctive aspect, nations are *sovereign*; they have the direct right to rule (the maximum tolerated is through God) over a territory. This is a result of the enlightenment period and the French Revolution. Previously, it was believed that God gave the Pope and the Emperor the right to rule. They, or just one of them, were legitimate rulers. With Luther and the rise of absolute monarchies, this belief was challenged. The revolution sanctioned a complete shift of legitimacy towards the people. As a result, for example, there might be dictators with no representative chambers, but the people, sovereign on a given land, must accept that, through a plebiscite.

Additionally, Anderson places importance in the use of what he calls 'print capitalism' to affirm the existence of today's nations. He goes a step further than Gellner in highlighting the subjectivity and the constructed idea of the nation and defining it, however the main argument of both is very similar.

4.2.3 The reminder of Hobsbawm

Eric Hobsbawm is one of the most important historians of the 20th century often giving sharp observations which are very relevant for political science. Given the prominence of

¹² 12 days before his death, Gellner proposed this interesting comparison in a public debate with his now influential former student, Anthony Smith. Gellner and Smith (1996)

nationalism in the 20th century Hobsbawm focussed much of his attention and wrote widely on this topic.

He departs from Gellner's premises and definitions, but offers substantial contributions and criticisms. Hobsbawm agrees with Gellner's main ideas, but criticises him for only taking a perspective from above, forgetting the one from below. In fact, he rightly points out that until a few decades ago only a minority, and sometimes a tiny minority, of the European population was able to read and write. For the majority of people the possibility of joining Gellner's high culture was precluded from the outset. In some countries, such as Italy (as we shall see in the next section), local languages or dialects were so different from one another that even oral communication was precluded.

Paradoxically, this observation leads to the conclusion, perhaps similar to the other modernists, that nation building is a process essentially constructed from above. Often the intelligentsia, or at least literate people, intend to spread their ideas to a wider public, in the best case, or to impose the use of a specific language, homogenise culture (using symbols and so on), and tell 'one history'. This observation leads to the conclusion that the 'illiterate', the majority until very recently, does not necessarily agree with, let alone know of, the nationalist argument, even if considered member of the same 'ethnic group'¹³. On the contrary, as it is apparent from a study from Hroch (1985), the masses seem the last to be affected (Hobsbawm 1992:12).

These people had to be convinced to be nationalists by those who were interested in creating a state. A task, which in some cases proved to be even more difficult given the fact that in some countries ordinary people were not able to speak the official common language of the literate population, but only a local language or dialect, depending on the definition of the latter.

To enforce both a common language and the idea of a common nation, new technologies, mainly in the area of communication (most notably TV) and mass schooling were widely used. Hobsbawm is also convinced that nationalism comes before nations, but adds that several stages are needed to include the whole population, or a great part of it. He offers three conclusions:

¹³ See 3.1 for a definition of ethnic group.

- 1) *official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what it is in the minds of even the most loyal citizens or supporters*
- 2) *we cannot assume that for most people national identification – when it exists – excludes or is always or ever superior to, the remainder of the set of identifications which constitute the social being. In fact, it is always combined with identifications of another kind, even when it is felt to be superior to them*
- 3) *national identification and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods. (Hobsbawm 1992:11)*

4.3 The importance of the past - Smith and others

A number of scholars challenge the main assumptions of the modernist school that the nation is a modern phenomenon, born in the 18th century, which can be understood as a process typical of the modern era. The main dividing line is the role attributed to the 'past'. For the modernists, as we have seen, that is nonessential. A common past of one kind or another is not the principle reason for a nation to emerge and, more importantly, it can be constructed, 'invented', or selected among different 'pasts'.

Liah Greenfeld (1992) chooses a different approach. He agrees that nationalism is modern, but with a few differentiations from the typical scholar of the modernist school. Firstly, he states that the concept of nation comes into being with the birth of the English nation which Greenfeld places in the early 16th century when Henry VIII nationalised the church. Secondly, he justifies the spread of nationalism, first with the dominance of England, and later the West. He even goes so far as to state that English nationalism "was superior to the imitator in the latter's own perception and the contact itself, more often than not served to emphasize the latter's inferiority" (Ibid: 121). Finally, he suggests that nationalism is the basis of this world and that democracy and nationalism are inherently linked and cannot be understood separately. This controversial author introduces the question, often commonplace, of nationalism (or at least national self-determination) equalizing democracy.

Adrian Hastings goes as far back as the bible, asserting that "without it [the bible] and its Christian interpretation and implementation, it is arguable the nations and nationalism, as we know them, could never have existed" (Hastings 1997: 2-5). The bible provided the original model, through the idea of biblical Israel. Hastings, as Greenfeld, views the English nation as the first to implement this prediction and even extends this process as far back as to the 10th century.

However, the author that has probably produced the most influential works and insisted most on the importance of the past is Anthony Smith. Actually he was a student of Gellner and, probably because of that, had very interesting and open debates with his former professor on the question of the past.

Smith suggests that although nations came to light recently, they are the result of a much longer development. A nation cannot be invented and is not an imaginary community. Nations are linked with existing *ethnie*, defined as groups with more permanent cultural attributes, such as memory, value, myth and symbolism, all embedded in the past (Smith 1986)¹⁴. "It is history, and history alone, which can furnish the bases of ethnic identity and the psychic reassurance of communal security that goes with it." (Smith, quoted in Hosking 1997: 182)

For Smith, "nationalists have a vital role to play in the construction of nations, not as culinary artists or social engineers, but as political archaeologists rediscovering and reinterpreting the communal past in order to regenerate the community. Their task is indeed selective - they forget as well as remember the past - but to succeed in their task they must meet certain criteria. Their interpretations must be consonant not only with the ideological demands of nationalism, but also with the scientific evidence, popular resonance and patterning of particular ethno histories." (Smith 1994: 19)

It is what he calls the 'Golden Age' that plays an important role. Memory of a period in antiquity with certain values and heroes is needed for a community to understand where they came from and how different they are from outsiders. Even more recent nations such as Finland, with an apparent lack of a glorious history, has its great era told in the *Kalevala*¹⁵. Smith even finds golden ages for Americans, Australians and other populations which could have difficulties identifying such a past (Smith 1997: 36-59).

I will not describe in full the ideas of Smith, which are quite complex. His definition of a nation - *a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and memories, a mass, public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members* – gives an idea of all the elements he includes. However, at this point, it is sufficient to say that according to Smith, a nation can be defined objectively and it has its foundation in a past that cannot be constructed or invented, but only rediscovered. A nation is an *ethnie* that

¹⁴ See 3.1 for definition of *ethnie* and ethnic group used in this paper.

becomes aware of being a nation and nationalism is the “ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity of a human population, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’” (Smith 1991: 4).

4.4 Summing up the main debates

As evident from the previous chapters there has been a good deal of disagreement over how to define nation and nationalism. I have decided to classify the main authors into two groups, modernist versus the rest, but the debates include several subjects. I will now try to define what I have understood to be the four main areas of disagreement and start building my argumentation, which will be fully developed in the following chapters. It is important to remember that I am focusing only on the western world. I am aware, however, that taking a wider geographical perspective would increase the number of debates.

4.4.1 Cultural vs. political

There are some scholars (Kamenka, Handler, Smith, etc.) who clearly insist that nationalism is a primarily cultural phenomenon and others (Hastings, Breully, Hechter, Hobsbawm, Gellner, Anderson, etc.) argue that it is political. This is a crucial aspect and very clear dividing line between authors. I will argue that both of these aspects are important and that actually, we should approach the concept of nation from a cultural perspective and nationalism from a political one. Culture, however, will have to be defined, as it seems to be unclear or at least not adequately explained in most literature on nationalism.

4.4.2 Modern vs. primordial

With this division, I want to highlight the disagreement over the actual ‘date of birth’ of nations. We have seen that those who adhere to the modernists, place it firmly in the 18th century. Others go back centuries with the assumed birth of the English nation. Moreover, others, following Smith's ideas, suggest that the process has been longer. Some even go back to the bible and the traditional nationalists believe that nations have basically always existed.

I believe that the answer to this historical dilemma cannot be a starting point. A discussion on the definition of nation is first needed, and following that, an answer can be found by

¹⁵ A compilation of Karelian ballads written by Elias Lönnrot.

examining history. As we shall see, however, the definition of nation is to a great deal influenced by the worldview one chooses to employ and therefore an answer to both ‘date of birth’ and what a nation is cannot be univocal. In this paper I will not try to engage in any historical discussion and therefore I will not assume any date of birth for the nation.

4.4.3 Constructed vs. natural/determinist

This debate is the most difficult one as it goes to the heart of the matter. It touches philosophical questions and the general worldview held by all. Anyone who truly believes in something supra-natural, God or whatever entity, will find it very difficult to accept a fully constructivist view of society in general and the nation in particular. Those who assert that a nation is an entirely constructed entity, automatically assume that there is nothing above ‘us’ who oversees these constructions. They may say that a God, or other entity, is giving instructions to a society to construct a nation in a certain way, but then the phenomenon becomes ‘natural’ again.

Having said this, it is somewhat surprising that recent scholars are, with almost no exception, excluding the possibility that nations are a fundamentally natural phenomenon. They either take a constructivist stand or a determinist viewpoint or something in between. By determinists I refer to scholars like Smith who believe that nations had to come in being due to their ethnic origins (these being perhaps ‘natural’ or developed naturally).

My position is clearly constructivist. As I will argue, natural, political, social, cultural and physical aspects, which I will group under the term ‘environment’ can all help the nation building process, but the latter is essentially constructed.

4.4.4 (Inter) Subjective vs. objective

How does one define a nation: in subjective (or inter-subjective) or in objective terms? Are there objective characteristics that allow us to state that a group is a nation or not? Or should we look at what the people concerned believe (subjective) or what they and others outside the group believe (inter-subjective)?

For those adhering to a traditional nationalist perspective and for those who give an important role to the past, the objective element is represented by a reference to something else,

assumed to be objective. They often refer to a language, an ethnic group or a culture. Unfortunately, history has shown that all these concepts are not immutable. Languages do change name, status (from and to dialect), they develop naturally as well as through imposition, etc. And the same applies to culture and ethnic groups, the latter also being a cultural phenomenon.¹⁶

The modernist, or better to say, the constructivists, are keener to take the subjective or inter-subjective approach as a consequence of rejecting any claim of nations being a natural phenomenon. Some, who refer back to the original ideas of the French revolution, highlight the importance of the ‘will of the people’ in defining a nation, and therefore take a subjective stand as well.

In this regard, Hobsbawm (1992) makes a point that a subjective definition cannot be given *a priori*, but only *a posteriori*. That is correct if we speak of a definition of a specific nation or of objective eligibility criteria to become one. However, I believe it is possible to provide a definition that describes both a nation in the real world and the nation as a concept. This can be congruent with a constructivist view that sees the nation without *a priori* objective characteristics, but with objectively identifiable subjective characteristics. Even if I do not fully subscribe to Anderson’s definition, I find it an important step towards understanding the subject.

¹⁶ I would refer to Hobsbawm (1992) for a very accurate historical account on languages and ethnic groups. I will discuss the question of culture later on this paper.

5. Towards a working definition

In the previous chapter, I have tried to demonstrate the complexity surrounding the issue of nationalism. While doing so I have already assumed some positions, which will be explained when trying to re-construct the concept of nation. Indeed, when issues are very complex, beginning from zero is often the best way out. I will do so by using some rather simple observations or reflections and then add theorised concepts and analysis to reformulate what nation might actually mean.

5.1 The starting points

Scholars disagree on the definition and nature of nations. It is also clear that in people's mind the word nation is often used interchangeably with many different concepts; state, culture, and a specified territory are perhaps the most common. Therefore, I believe we can abandon the ambition to suggest a universal definition that would satisfy everyone.

I think the first step is to decide what is the purpose of arriving at a definition. The view taken here is that nation should be defined in relation to the common political project of nationalist movements. Ultimately, I am not concerned with the questions of when or how nations have come to exist, as these are not relevant for the political project of the different nationalist movements. However such questions are very interesting and useful from a historical perspective and for those interested in discovering the causes of nationalism.

What is this common project then? Undoubtedly there are and there have been many different types of nationalist movements with very different agendas and ideological backgrounds. Some, especially in the 19th century and before, have been classified more as leftist movements, or liberation movements fighting oppressive regimes, whereas more recent nationalism is usually placed on the right of the political spectrum even though nationalist agendas are also present elsewhere. For example, today, a nationalist can be the former president of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, or the East Timorese liberation movement.

What all schools of thought seem to agree on is that all nationalist movements are engaged in nation building. This can mean a process of reminding people about the past of an *ethnie*, as Smith argues, or it can be a process of inventing outright, or at least strategically selecting, traditions, parts of history and cultural aspects of a targeted population (as modernist,

instrumentalists and Marxists are keener to suggest). In other words, it is a process which leads people to believe they are part of the same nation. Whether that nation is invented or 'reminded' is irrelevant for this purpose.

Nation building does not apply only to would-be nations, but also to existing ones. It is not only a question of creating a nation, but also of reinforcing national feelings. Here, it is important to mention the contribution from Billing (1995). In his book, he defines Banal Nationalism as something that is occurring every day, even in countries whose governments or leading political parties do not define themselves, and are not generally regarded as, nationalist. Banal Nationalism is about 'reminding' a certain population about being a nation, by exposing symbols of unity, promoting national culture, etc.

So, if nationalist movements have in common, as a sort of lowest common denominator, the process of nation building, what is nation in relation to this? Or more precisely, on what factors should nationalists base their actions in order to be successful in creating a new nation or reinforcing an existing one? Fundamentally, as reflected throughout this paper, it is only a matter of reordering ideas. I collect these ideas under three key-words: identity, culture, and territory.

5.2 Identity

We know of no people without names, no languages or cultures in which some manner of distinctions between self and other, we and they are not made... Self-knowledge – always a construction no matter how much it feels like a discovery – is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others (Spence, quoted in Castells 1997: 6).

"Identity is the people's source of meaning and experience" (Castells 1997: 6). Throughout a process that reaches its peak in adolescence, every person tries to find his/her place in society by forming his/her own identity. We need to be *someone*, to be able to describe what we are, be identified by others and identify others. Identity is a very powerful concept as it goes deep into our psychology, although, as stated in the quote above, identity is generally recognised to be a constructed concept.

When talking about nations, we are more concerned with the concept of social (or collective) identity - *that part of the individual's self-concept emanating from membership in groups* (Hechter 2000: 32).

Generally human beings identify with one or more groups. Gender (male/female), sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, etc.), class (worker, etc.), profession (teacher, etc.), football club (Manchester United, etc.), religion (muslim, etc.), a company (Microsoft, etc.), an organisation (Greenpeace, etc.), a city (New York, etc.) are just examples of categories of possible social identities. Nations are also a very common source of social identity. A person could, at the same time, identify herself as a lesbian, worker, teacher, supporter of Manchester United, activist of Greenpeace, New Yorker, and American. They could all affect her personality, the way she behaves in relations to others and the way she is treated by others. Obviously, this person may not want to always show all her identities. Her sexual orientation identity may be hidden on her working place, for example. Moreover, these social identities could enter into conflict with each other. For example, suppose some people in New York wanted to be independent from the USA because they believed they were different. If they started to build an army and the US government would ask its people not to join the separatists, which of the two identities would prevail? What is the primary identity?

In a published recently book, Hechter reports that one leading view in social psychology affirms that

[...] people try to increase their self-esteem by trying to achieve a positive social identity. Since social identities have differential prestige, it follows that the higher a given group's prestige, the more that membership in it contributes to individual self-esteem (ibid: 32).

Without entering too much into the realm of psychology, there seems to be a connection to interest and social acceptance which leads people, more or less consciously, to attribute more importance to one or the other social identity. It is clear that in today's society, nations are one of the most recognised groups, even more than religions, and often have the highest prestige. In addition to those who are commonly classified as nationalist, also governments, party leaders, movements, and others, often do their best to raise the profile of and the benefits from membership of a particular nation at home and abroad. No wonder people's primary social identity is often a national one.

This applies also to stateless nations in situations of oppression. How is it possible that a person would receive more self-esteem by membership in an oppressed group? The answer is to be found in the fact that identities are normally not chosen by the individual, but they are socially constructed. When a person is excluded from joining the dominant nation (or any social identity), then to reinforce his/her self-esteem, s/he will attribute a more positive role to his/her oppressed nation.

5.3 Culture

*HEAVEN is where
the police are British
the chefs are French
the lovers Italian
the mechanics German
and it is all organized by the Swiss!*

*HELL is where
the police are German
the chefs are British
the lovers Swiss
the mechanics French
And it is all organised by the Italians!¹⁷*

Defining and understanding culture is at least as problematic as defining a nation. Also in this area of study there is a very wide variety of literature with no final consensus on a common idea¹⁸. As with nation, the term culture is often used interchangeably with country, state, ethnic group and, perhaps most often, with nation itself. This already emphasises the important links between the two terms.

So, what is culture and how different is it from the concept of nation?

Contrary to identity, culture does not necessarily emphasise the concepts of inclusion-exclusion. Taking an objective approach, culture is about how things are generally done and understood; **it is a learnt code of interpretation of reality that tells us how to behave in different situations**. This code is learned, although not always in a formal, organised or even conscious setting. Cultural artefacts, such as monuments, paintings, literature and music compositions are just an expression of a culture, but they are not themselves culture, as they need culture to interpret it and make sense, or use, of it. They are deceptively called 'high culture'.

This interpretative code, culture, is virtually never the same in more than one individual. In fact, the same individual is likely to use different codes (read cultures) for different situations at different times. "The person's culture is an incorporated part of his identity as a socially

¹⁷ Reproduced from Dahl, 1995:9.

¹⁸ See for example: Hofstede (1991), Schollon and Wong Schollon. (1995), Samovar, and Porter, (1997), Marsh (1998), Leontiev (1992)

acting human being". Furthermore, he might behave differently according to the social group s/he is acting in. When talking about a person's culture the distinction between culture and personality is often blurred. (Marsh 1998: 5)

In fact, culture is mainly attributed to groups rather than to individuals. There are references made to the Chinese culture, the yuppie culture, etc. According to one of the most famous definitions, "culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another"¹⁹. Many, including myself, find this definition problematic as it takes a maximalist, top-down approach. It assumes, or at least it leads one to assume, that members of a culture behave almost identically and this behaviour clearly distinguishes them from members of another culture. This generalisation is commonly made. The term 'national cultures' is often used, assuming, for example, that all French nationals share the same culture - and therefore will behave accordingly. Is this so? Can we say that all people residing (or born) in France have a common set of cultural traits? I am sure not all 'French' drink wine, as it might be assumed, as I am sure not all French lack good organisational skills, as the 'Germans' are said to believe. The same goes with the English liking tea, or the Italians liking espresso-coffee. It is clear that this is not the case. So, what happens to those members who do not adhere to the stereotyped set of cultural characteristics - do they not have a culture? Are there any characteristics that would apply to an entire national population?

A first answer is that each individual possesses a unique, complex personality, which is not the full reflection of a shared culture. As shown above, it is possible to identify with different social groups, which use other interpretative codes. It is clear that within one nation different cultures such as teen-age and elderly cultures that are quite different, or workers and managers of multinationals. Should we expect an Austrian worker to be culturally closer to a well-off Austrian manager or to a German worker?

Also important is the analysis of the question of awareness of culture and the effects of culture on behaviour. As generally agreed for nations, cultures too cannot live in isolation in order to be identified. They can only be understood in relations to one another. Cultures do exist, but one becomes aware of them only when encountering a different culture, or by learning that things can be done differently. If a person, for example, is not aware of a

¹⁹ Hofstede quoted in Samovar and Porter (1991:51)

different way of greeting a second person (e.g. kissing on a cheek instead of shaking hands), s/he naturally will not understand that her/his greeting is just one way, albeit it is very possible to be ethnocentric and believe that his/her way is the best way. Cultural superiority and racism are related questions, although outside the scope of this paper. The important point here is that discovering difference is necessary to produce awareness.

Therefore, a person can become aware of the existence of a culture by encountering and recognising others, something that is very likely in today's world of modern communication and fast transportation. Although rarely capable of understanding all the characteristics of a specific culture, this 'exposed' person should also be able to understand that s/he lives in a specific cultural context and should be able to understand that other people live in other cultural contexts. Can a person assume certain behaviours from others according to their cultural 'belonging'? Most studies tend to believe so and are by nature 'cross-cultural', meaning that they compare representative samples of (normally national) populations. The influential work in the 1970s of Hofstede (1991) compared the cultural clusters of IBM workers of different nationalities working in different countries. He created a classification that has been as much used as criticised. As shown with the examples above, it is very difficult to generalise behaviour, especially when one refers to such a large number of people as an average nation would include.

Scholars adhering to the so-called minimalist school are indeed very critical of this approach. They criticise the maximalists for using a top-down approach that assumes that through and from generalisations we can understand and predict individual behaviour. Cultures, especially national cultures, cannot be seen as static (i.e. never changing) nor as the "only program to run our minds"²⁰. Instead, minimalists propose a bottom-up approach. Starting from the individual, cultural attributes, deriving from many cultures, can be seen as part of a more complex personality that operates in different environments and situations. For an individual it would be like having different sets of luggage to be used, as s/he needs, depending on the situation.²¹

²⁰ Paraphrasing Hofstede's definition of culture: "Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede 1991)

²¹ For theories on culture from the minimalist schools see for example Marsh (1998), Schollon and Wong Schollon (1995).

The challenge is to avoid confusing an *objective* and rather artificial definition of culture, with the *subjective* need that each individual has to belong to a social group and have a social identity. While one can *belong* to a specific identity group, s/he can only possess (and use according to the situation) certain codes of interpretation of reality (cultures) and eventually be *aware* of them and of the existence of other codes.

From these reflections it is possible to conclude that culture does not equal nation²², but also allows me to go further. Although behaviour is not dependent on a single culture, generalisations are still commonly made and, as I argue, are useful for they, among other effects, reinforce social identities.²³ The perception of being ‘similar’ to other members of a group and of being ‘different’ from outsiders is a powerful surrogate to the social identity as previously defined. For a person to identify with a social group, it is necessary that this group is perceived as different from others and that it possesses certain characteristics with which it is possible to identify. For example, the punk culture has its special dressing code; a nation may have different language, cooking traditions, etc. Nourishing and cultivating a common culture contributes to building a group identity and, consequently, a sense of difference from others. I am referring to a specific set of cultural traits to be associated with a specific group. In fact, members of a given group will not behave in the same way and the single cultural characteristics will not be unique. Most importantly, the members of a group will also identify with other groups having different sets of cultural attributes. As explained with social identities, people identify with different groups, and therefore different assumed sets of cultural traits. An individual uses one or the other identity and one or the other cultural trait according to the situation/environment s/he is in at a given moment of interaction. Individuals interact, cultures do not.

So far I have avoided using the term *stereotypes*, as it generally has a negative connotation. The American journalist Walter Lippmann (1922) first used this term in the social sciences as “pictures in our heads” (Dahl 1995:9). This is indeed how the ‘generalisations’ I mentioned earlier should be called. In communication, stereotypes are needed to increase our ability to predict and explain the behaviour of other people. Therefore, if we want to (and we actually must) communicate, we need to stereotype. According to Adler (1991:72), one way for a stereotype to be helpful is to be “[...] consciously held. The person should be aware that he or

²² Even if many studies focus on national cultures, I have not encountered any author who would explicitly affirm this.

²³ For a psychological explanation of this see for example Tajfel (1995).

she is describing a group norm rather than the characteristics of a specific individual”. This is a crucial point. One thing is to use stereotypes to make predictions, another is to assume that those predictions will surely be met, or worse, that the stereotypes were not even predictions, but ‘natural’ aspects of all members of a specific identity group.

From this analysis it can be concluded that what is often referred to as national culture is nothing more than stereotypes, or rather **national stereotypes**, as they refer to a specific identity group, which is the nation. We are talking about a set of perceived common cultural traits, helpful to make predictions in people’s interactions and also to reinforce national identity²⁴. By extension I would add to the concept of national stereotypes a perceived set of common physical traits. Finally, I include symbols (flag, national anthem, literature and all so called ‘high culture’, etc.), more typical cultural habits (greeting in a certain way, attitudes towards money, etc.) and common history. National stereotypes are very useful, not only to reinforce the identity from within the group, but also to be recognised as different from the outside. They are sometimes used seriously and often used as jokes. For example, I have heard of well paid trainers instructing businesspeople on how to behave in a foreign country by simply illustrating that the inhabitants will behave according to their national stereotypes (sometimes making fun of them).

To summarise, I am suggesting that it is important to be aware of the existence of many cultures affecting the behaviour of each individual, who will then act according to a given situation. Associating one culture with an individual would be scientifically erroneous. One can associate a set of cultural traits, or in this case national stereotypes, to a named group of people aiming, for example, to cement their identity inside the group and recognition from outside. Associating one set of cultural traits (with even the arrogance of calling it culture) to a specific identity is likely to be part, consciously or unconsciously, of a nationalist project.

5.4 Territory

Most definitions of nation include an element of territoriality. This is the least controversial term among the three chosen in this paper. Territory can quite easily be defined as a delimited piece of land. The importance it has in relation to nations is of historical nature. When people in Europe moved from hunting and gathering into agricultural based economy, territory begun

²⁴ Michael Kunczik (1997) illustrates the importance of “image cultivation” of a nation, making very interesting points on the use of stereotypes, propaganda and education.

to acquire much more importance. Writing on nationalism, Hechter (2000) illustrates the importance of social and physical boundaries and its correspondent structures of control. Boundaries were established to avoid the situation where those not contributing to the common wealth (i.e. cultivating the land) would consume the common goods.

Hechter (ibid.) also argues that nations could potentially have existed since the advent of agriculture, but did not do so because the empires of the time (e.g. Romans, Persia, Egypt, etc.) did not possess the technology (mainly communication and transportation) to impose direct rule. In fact, they delegated rule to local chiefs. Already having correspondence between the territorial unit and the governance unit, nationalism did not need to emerge. The same happened during the Middle Ages with the famous feudal system and its delegation of power.

Whether we agree or not with Hechter's analysis, it is difficult to disregard the fact that land has meant control over resources and power for a long time. Nationalism being a political phenomenon where power is an important element, it goes without saying that territory and nationalism must be linked. As a consequence there is at least an indirect connection between nation and territory.

Indeed, it is possible to say that territory is an important distinguishing element between nations and other forms of identity groups. Religious identity, for example, is not generally associated with a specific territory. One can be Christian, Muslim or Buddhist anywhere in the world. Similarly, there are identity groups that are still territorial, but are not generally regarded as nations, such as, for instance, city identities or youth gangs in certain areas of big cities. Therefore, territory cannot be the only distinguishing element.

This is very true when we speculate about the future. The importance of agriculture has reduced considerably especially in Western countries. In fact, only a small percentage of the population in the European Union and the USA are occupied in the agricultural sector. It is still possible to say that industry is territorially based, but also that it is losing importance to the benefit of the so-called third sector. Many activities of the latter are not strictly connected to a specific place. Perhaps the most interesting cases are the multinational corporations. They have activities worldwide and are becoming more and more powerful. The largest have more economic power than many states and their influence is made clear in many states' policies

and in international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation. Given that multinational corporations also promote ‘organisational culture’ and ‘corporate identity’ to increase their efficiency, would it be too hazardous to say that they too will behave as nations in the future? This is an open question for further research. What is important here is to acknowledge the role of a territory in the conceptualisation of nations.

5.5 Reconstructing ‘nation’

Nation: a relatively large group of people who, at a given time, believes, and is generally believed, to share a common identity, to possess a set of common cultural and, in some cases, physical traits (or ‘national stereotypes’), and to be associated with a named territory.

On the basis of what has been argued in the previous chapters, I would propose to use the above long, but more precise, working definition of a nation to determine the extent to which a nationalist movement has managed to build a nation. The definition focuses on the three elements I have highlighted: identity, culture, and territory, with the eventual inclusion of physical traits.

What does this definition not include?

For reasons previously explained, this definition does not explicitly state that nations are modern, nor do they have a long past, although the inclusion of the element of territoriality suggests a connection to the historical period when the exploitation of land was a fundamental part of human economy. This definition is very much based on the belief and perception of both the members of the nations and the outsiders. I have chosen not to include the idea of sovereignty in the definition of nation, but to instead relegate it to the concept of nationalism. Sovereignty being a political definition fits better among claims made by political movements and can be historically confined. Instead, the intention is to use the definition above as an almost a-historical analytical tool for the case that will be illustrated in the second section of this paper. In this way forms of nationalism and their derivative nations, where sovereignty is not a primary issue²⁵, are also included. Also the memory of a common history, present in various definitions, is not separately mentioned here, as I believe it is part of identity symbols. Finally, the definition does not explicitly specify that a nation is limited, which is similar to

²⁵ I refer here to the more moderate nationalist movements, such as some Catalonian movements, or even to the ‘banal nationalism’ illustrated by Billig (1995).

Anderson indicating that nations could not live in isolation. However, as shown in the previous chapter, that idea is implied in the concepts of social identity and culture.

What does this definition include?

The words 'relatively large' serve to indicate that, as Hechter (2000) points out as well, the definition does not refer to small groups such as inhabitants of a village where its members know each other directly and not through media. I could have used Anderson's 'imagined community' (1991), but I found the word community unconvincing when referring to equality among members.

This definition emphasises the idea of belief, which means that the rest of the sentence does not need to be true, or completely true. What is important is the belief or the perception. It is in this realm that the nationalist engaged in nation building should act. Use of mass-media, propaganda and education are all effective tools for this purpose. This definition attempts to provide an objective proposition of a subjective phenomenon. This is important following the discussion on the variability of social identities and cultures illustrated in 4.4.4.

Association with a territory shows the importance of belonging to a land and vice-versa, that land belonging to the nation in question. However, also in this case, I find it more prudent to leave territory in the realm of beliefs as there might be members of national group and, above all, outsiders who disagree with this idea. Also, whereas the name of a territory is normally agreed by convention, its exact limits are often disputed, both by the outsiders and by some members of the nation itself.

5.6 Nation building and the environment

It is now time to go back to the concept of nation building, which is the central activity of nationalist movements and the environment in which they operate.

Nation building, in one sense, is like team building, a well known concept in education or sport. Only that nation building usually deals with much larger groups that cannot gather in a single place and whose members do not know each other (for the most part). It also deals with territorial identity, by associating a group to a specific land.

A parallel could be drawn between the nation building process and team building in a training course. Firstly, this process starts with the selection of a target group. Discriminatory criteria should be identified. In the case of nations this could range from the use of a specific native language, to particular physical traits, to religious affiliation, present or past presence in a specific territory and of course descent from others having the same characteristics. However, what counts is that this targeted population eventually feels part of the same group, and outsiders will consider them as such. In the case of a training course, the criteria used will outline the profile of participants. For example, the criteria could be: under 30 years old, previous knowledge of a certain subject, knowledge of a certain common language, etc.

Anybody could come with a set of criteria, but this would obviously be insufficient to convince the targeted group that they should form a self-conscious group, not to mention a nation. A series of advantages should be proposed to this population. These could include three kinds: economic, psychological or social. The first refers to material advantages. For instance, becoming better off by joining a nation could be an economic advantage. It is easily arguable that an independent Catalonia or Padania (as we shall see) or Slovenia as it turned out to be, could be richer if taxes did not have to be paid and then diverted to the relatively poorer parts of the state to which they belong to. For a training course, this would be represented as the expected outcome. Getting to know a new skill, improve efficiency or solely participate in a course would automatically result in a pay raise.

The psychological advantage can include a sense of protection, of power (by being member of powerful nation), of common faith, etc. A training course could for example promise to solve stress at work by teaching new methods to deal with it.

Finally, the social advantage is represented by the possibility of acquiring a certain position in society, such as having more rights vis-à-vis the rest of society. For a training course, it is easy to imagine that participants may increase their social status by acquiring a series of competencies that would allow them to be 'better' in society or at work.

Native language is often a discriminatory element in being included in a targeted group, but now always. The American nation, for example, includes millions of people who speak languages other than English as their mother tongue (i.e. Spanish, Italian, etc.). The same case stands for many, almost all, European nations. For example, the French and the Italians, just

to mention two, which were all internally divided by several languages, or dialects, so that people could hardly understand one another. Still, it is very important for a nationalist movement to promote the use of a common language in order to keep the communication channels open. This is valid for any group, but it is particularly important for nations as they are large and often need mass-media such as TV, radio or newspapers to communicate and educate. This also explains the historically strategic importance of education in the nation building process (Kunczick 1997).

“The only difference between ‘propaganda’ and ‘education’, really, is the point of view. The advocacy of what we believe in is education. The advocacy of what we don’t believe in is propaganda.” (Bernays 1923: 212)

Edward Bernays, founding father of PR, produced this rather strong statement. It certainly has an element of truth if we consider that governments make instrumental use of education to promote certain values, a certain reading of history and, quite strongly in the 20th and 19th century in some European countries, the use of a single language. It is interesting to note how in France, teachers were always sent to a school in a different region to avoid the use of local dialects/languages. In Italy, using any dialect form would constitute a serious mistake and lead, in the past, to punishment (Camera & Fabietti 1987).

All actions a nationalist movement performs in order to change the existing environment, or perception of it, in order to create or increase a sense of collective identity, are part of the nation-building process. By environment I mean all existing physical and social conditions at a given time. The emphasis again has to be on perception rather than objective reality. For example, the perception that the Alps to the north and the sea all around the peninsula constitute the natural borders of Italy is part of the physical environment at a given time. As we shall see, the creation of Padania proposes an alternative ‘physical environment’, or, better said, perception of the physical environment. Similarly, regarding the social environment, the existing national stereotypes, as previously defined, the economic situation, or the political institutions are all part of the social environment in which a targeted population finds itself at a given time. The nation building process intends to exploit the resources of the environment (e.g. economic problems, unfair distribution of resources, division in various identity groups) in order to change the environment itself and create a single nation from that group.

Imposing or promoting a single language, teaching a selected history with certain emphasis, frequently using common symbols such as flags or national anthems, creating hatred against the outsiders (with racist propaganda, acts of violence, etc.), are just some of the most effective tools that have been used by nationalist movements to change the environment and perform the nation building process. Again, these were just tools, a means to reach a goal. A specific nationalist actor may have very different declared and undeclared aims. The most common declared aim is the one of creating a state, for example by seceding from a larger state. But often the aims, or part of them, are not declared and even, as we saw with banal nationalism, operated by governments or political parties that do not have an explicit nationalist agenda. The nation building process is a combination of political will and exploitation of available resources provided by the social environment. I believe that both political will, or motive, and the presence of a suitable social environment are necessary conditions for a nation to come to exist.

6. Concluding remarks

Writing on nations and nationalism is always a risky business. Not only does the present literature lack consensus on these concepts, but also the subject enters into the heart of complicated and intense human feelings connected to identity and culture. This makes it very difficult to have a detached approach. The one attempted here has started with a clarification of the terminology to then try to illustrate the ideas of the main scholars in the field, aiming to provide a general overview. Predictably, this view has resulted to be complicated. The next challenge was to reorder the various elements under four main debates, excluding those that would go beyond a study limited to the European and North American experience. A choice had to be made according to two criteria. On the one hand, following a constructivist ‘world-view’ approach (as opposed to a determinist one in this case) I have come to disregard a number of theories, which I view as being no longer supported by the main contemporary researchers. The second criterion was based on elaborating a definition. In this paper I have not sought to find a historical explanation for the existence of nations, nor to determine causes. I have rather chosen to focus on its use by political nationalist movements. Identity, culture and territory (with the possible addition of ‘physical traits’) have become predominant elements for the rest of the analysis; the process of nation building and the social environment in which this happens will be the main area of study in this thesis.

In the conclusive working definition, this paper suggests considering the concept of nation as identity-centred, made political by nationalist movements. Consequently, as it is also commonly perceived, nation as an identity-group is not necessarily the cause of social problems. What is potentially dangerous is the use made of nations. Nationalism has been an ideology that has fully exploited the potentials of nation building, being able to bring both destruction and prosperity. The supremacy of national interest, as opposed to various other possible supreme orders (religious, human rights, communal interest – where by community we mean a territorial group identity referring to few individuals who live in close proximity, etc.) has replaced other forms of motivation for human action. Let's take the army as an example. Nationalism has brought and allowed conscription in most countries; something that I believe would have been very difficult in the past. Before conscription, soldiers had to be promised material wealth in order to go into combat. Promises of land, conquered or at home, and of money, from plundering or from the ruler's treasury, were among the main motivating factors. Some obviously joined the troops for pleasure or honour, but generally not under the assumption that joining was good for the fatherland, or for its 'national interest'. In the past we had what are today called mercenaries and what, in some sense, we have returned to in the form of the professional army. Western European countries are increasingly opting for a voluntary, regularly paid army. Is this an indicator of a loss of steam for nationalism?

The increased power of partially supranational institutions such as the European Union also suggests a similar direction. However, even when we limit our view to western countries, to members of the European Union, there are examples of nationalisms such as the Catalan, the Basque, the Corsican, the Scottish and others that instead point to the persistence or perhaps reformulation of nationalism. One less studied, but very interesting, case is the Lega Nord in Italy. What have been the environmental conditions there? What has been the strategy adopted and rhetoric used by Lega Nord? How effective has this nation-building process been? Studying Lega Nord and other cases from these perspectives can provide useful insights in the heated debate over nation and nationalism, perhaps helping to circumvent the seemingly unsolvable debates over the origin and causes of nations. The following sentence has inspired and supported my motivation in the second section to which we shall now turn.

“National identification and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods. In my judgement, this is the area of national studies in which, thinking and research are most urgently needed today.” (Hobsbawm 1992:11)

Section II: the case of Lega Nord

1. Introduction

In the first section of this paper it was shown how complicated the issue of nationalism is, and, in particular, how scholars have found it problematic to agree on the origins of nations and on a definition. Far from trying to solve these disputes entirely, this paper has tried so far to summarise the major debates and provide a *working definition* of nation, based on the elaboration of main related concepts such as identity, culture and territory. I have argued that one way to understand nations is to analyse how nationalist movements make use of it, in particular during the so called nation building process and within an environment as explained in chapter 5.6.

This second section will look at a particular case of nationalist movement, Lega Nord (LN). In fact, LN is not always regarded as nationalist, as it is promoting a 'nation' for the Padanians, without an officially recognised relevant history. Indeed, even the name itself, Padania, is not visible in any history book. So was the name of Estonians, says Gellner (Gellner and Smith 1996). Certainly, LN has been acting as a nationalist movement, achieving some success, as will be illustrated later in this paper.

The case of LN allows one to look beyond the traditional arguments on nationalism and nation. As shown in the first section, the role of the past is among the most important dividing lines between scholars on the topic. The following section describes how LN deals with the past, and how LN followers' behaviour can be interpreted in terms of nationalist theories. However, this will not be the guiding line. Most important is to test the definitions and the conceptual framework built in the first section against the case of Lega Nord.

In the first part of this section, the 'hard facts' will be explored: how Lega Nord has developed from its inception until the time this paper was written. Particular emphasis will be given to LN's electoral performance, as a measurement of its popular support, and to LN's internal functioning, as an example of a nationalist movement.

The second part of section II will analyse the way LN has made use of the existing environment and then look at the nation building process with the tools that have been employed to reinforce identity and promote cultural stereotypes for the target group. The

analysis will offer some tentative conclusions and suggestions to be related back to the general theory on nationalism and, eventually, to be used in further studies on nationalism.

2 What is Lega Nord

2.1 Present day Lega Nord

Lega Nord (LN) has been one of the mainstream parties in the Italian political scene for over 10 years. Although it receives most of its support from Italy's northern regions only, LN's national political weight has dramatically increased in the 90's, becoming the 4th most voted party. At one point, in 1994, due to the mainly uninominal electoral system it was even the most represented group in the Parliament.

At the time of writing, LN is part of the government led by Silvio Berlusconi of Forza Italia in coalition with Alleanza Nazionale, a party formerly linked with neo-fascist ideas, and with Centro Cristiano Democratico (Christian Democratic Centre), one of the small parties originated by the fall of the Christian Democrats. In the last election, in 2001, LN lost much of its representation in the Parliament, arguably partially due to a bipolar electoral campaign based on two blocks, one of which was led by Berlusconi. LN now counts on 46 parliamentarians (30 in the lower chamber and 16 in the Senate) and holds the ministries of 'Welfare' (Roberto Maroni), of 'Justice' (Roberto Castelli) and of 'Reform and Devolution' (Umberto Bossi). Lega Nord has also three elected members in the European Parliament and controls several municipalities, provinces and regions in the north of Italy.

Together with Forza Italia, with its owner and manager Silvio Berlusconi, Lega Nord is the only major party in Italy which has always been centred on one leader: Umberto Bossi.

2.2 History and development²⁶

2.2.1 1979-1989: From the regional leagues to Lega Nord

Italy, as many other countries, has long had autonomist movements in areas of the country where there is a relevant presence of a self-conscious, and externally recognised, minority

²⁶ Unless indicated, the information contained in this chapter is based on Fassini (1996), the most comprehensive book published by LN on their own history, or on Lega Nord (1998, 2001, 2002), Lega Nord Piemonte (2002)

group. For example, the region of Alto Adige (called Sud Tirol by German speaking communities in Italy and abroad), has a number of inhabitants whose mother tongue is German. Most of these people vote for a party called South Tyrol People's Party. Traditionally there have been similar political parties or movements in other regions like Sardinia (Sardinian Action Party) or Val d'Aosta (Union Valdotaïne). However, the constituency and political success of these parties has been very local. On the national level, they have tried to preserve and promote the autonomy of their regions, in terms of promoting the use of their own language, as a mechanism to ensure participation in public and political life of those who considered themselves part of a minority in the Italian state. In no case have they succeeded, or sometimes even dared, in making a strong case in favour of a complete independence. (Brierley and Giacometti 1996:180-181)

Also the new leagues, most notably the Liga Veneta and Lega Autonomista Lombarda, came to life at the end of 70's - beginning of the 80's as autonomist movements promoting their local dialects²⁷. Liga Veneta appeared in 1979 taking part in the local election; its founders were Franco Rocchetta, Marilena Marin and Achille Tramarine. Lega Autonomista Lombarda was formally founded in 1984 by Umberto Bossi, Giuseppe Leoni, Dino Daverio, Marino Moroni, Sergio Sogliaghi and Manuela Marrone. The latter, of southern origins became Bossi's second wife later on.

These two leagues' claims and political programmes were mainly cultural in content. In 1996, the current leader of Lega Nord (then, of Lega Autonomista Lombarda), Umberto Bossi, referred to this period as the 'ethnic phase', "when the League was pushed forward by simple, but courageous men (sic!) who stood up mainly against the social and cultural, rather than economic effects of the Roman colonialism" (Fassini 1998:130). It has been argued that social disintegration occurred in Italy during the 80's and the consequent political transformations favoured the rise of these new leagues (Brierley and Giacometti 1996:178-180).

Lega Nord was in fact a step forward for Umberto Bossi after he had transformed his own Lega Autonomista Lombarda into something more than an autonomist movement promoting local culture. His ambition was a sort of federation of all leagues, or what was called 'etnofederalism', that is "the unification of several ethnic nationalist movements into one

political instrument” (Brierley and Giacometti 1996:183). Undoubtedly, Umberto Bossi has been the central figure of this project from its beginning until the present. Any attempt to discredit or even challenge his leadership has been immediately crushed. Even well known figures such as some parliament members elected through LN or the president of the party have been expelled when showing any sign of dissent.

Umberto Bossi was born on 19/9/1941 in Cassano Magnano, near Varese (Lombardy). He considers Bruno Salvatori, leader of another small autonomist movement, Union Valdotaïne, his ‘maestro’. Bossi accepted the ‘obligation’ to continue Salvatorini’s cause after his death. Their ‘inspiring’ meeting happened in 1979, when Bossi also left the university (faculty of medicine), having the year before divorced from his first wife.

It was in 1982 that Lega Autonomista Lombarda (LAL) started taking its shape, also publishing a magazine called *Lombardia Autonomista*. In the meantime and in parallel, Liga Veneta of Franco Rocchetta started obtaining good local electoral results in Veneto. In 1985, LAL stood for election and obtained some small but encouraging results; for example 2.66% in Varese, electing one member to the city council. Only two years later, in the same town they obtained almost 12%.

1987 was also the year when LAL presented candidates for the national election, obtaining 0,5% of the votes and electing a member for both chambers of the Parliament, Umberto Bossi being elected as a senator and Giuseppe Leoni as a member in the lower chamber. This was of extreme encouragement for the party, opening the way for national publicity, funding, etc. On 7-9/12/1989, in Segrate, the first national party congress (‘congress nassjonal’ in the local dialect) of LAL took place, gathering, according to the organisers, 500 people. The statutes of Lega Autonomista Lombarda were approved and the enthusiasm typical of new movements was very high.

2.2.2 1990-1999: The political success: Lega Nord enters onto the national political scene as one of the four main national parties

In 1990 double-digit results in local elections brought Lega Autonomista Lombarda into a leading position in many municipalities. LAL became the second biggest party in the

²⁷ In fact, I am a bit hesitant to use the term dialect, rather than language here. Although for some people this distinction is clear, I tend to view that “dialects are just a language without an army”.

Lombardy region with 18% of the votes cast and the fourth party in the city of Milan with 13% of the votes. These were important and surprising results for a new party competing with mass parties such as the Christian Democrats or the Italian Communist Party. Bossi immediately called the first gathering in Pontida (on 20/3/90), and this became a traditional reunion for the masses of Lega Nord. Pontida, in Lombardy, is an important symbolic place for the rhetoric of LN (see chapter 4.3.3) and has been used several times since for big gatherings.

Given the substantial support received by the working class, Bossi decided to establish a new trade union, the *Sindacato Autonomista Lombardo* (SAL). The idea was to compete with the almost monopoly of membership detained by the three major confederations, CGIL, CISL and UIL, respectively dominated by the communist members, christian-democrats, and socialists. Also a local radio was set up with the name of Radio Varese.

However the major move occurred on 8-10/2/1991 when the first federal congress of Lega Nord was called to order. Representatives from the various leagues²⁸ gathered in Pieve Emanuele. Lega Nord as a party and a confederation of all these leagues was formed and was then able to present itself at future national election rounds.

On 16/6/1991, a new large gathering²⁹ in Pontida proclaimed the symbolic beginning of '*La potentissima repubblica del Nord*' – the 'most powerful' republic of the North. The superlative 'Potentissima' recalls the name used for the old republic of Venice, called 'la senerissima' – most serene. During this gathering, Bossi outlined the major justification for the independentist line Lega Nord was about to undertake: "The traditional nation state is at the same time too small and too big. It is too small if one considers the dimension of its internal market. It is instead too big as a unit of management of public finance. For this reason, they become economies afflicted by dirigisme and not efficient, where economic lobbies can easily obtain favourable provisions from the Government, to the damage of small producer" (Fassini 1996:49). In this speech Bossi clearly addressed the small businesses, which are very important in the socio-economic landscape of the north of Italy. The league had by then completed its transition from a movement making claims for cultural autonomy to

²⁸ Lega Autonomista Lombarda, Liga Veneta, Piemont Autonomista, Union Ligure, Friuli, Trieste, Trentino, Lega Emiliano-Romagnola, Alleanza Toscana, Lega Toscana, Movimento per la Toscana.

²⁹ 25 000, according to the organisers.

an independentist movement with the aim of preserving, in addition to cultural aspects, the economic interests of a targeted population.

This choice received so much support that in the 1992 national elections, LN became the fourth most voted party in Italy, with 8.7% of the votes, electing 55 deputies to the lower chamber of the Parliament and 25 senators. Considering that LN received almost no votes in the south of Italy, it meant that LN was in some areas of the north the most popular party, as the local election in 1993 confirmed. Milan, the largest city in Italy in terms of economic productivity and second in terms of population, voted 57% for LN and elected its own mayor, Marco Formentini. Other cities in the north of Italy also came under LN control.

It is important to note that the 1992 elections were affected by the beginning of a series of legal actions against high level politicians, shocking the Italian political scene in the years to come. The whole operation was called '*Mani Pulite*' – clean hands. Many important politicians, including party leaders such as Bettino Craxi, the very influential secretary general of the Italian Socialist Party, were involved in cases of corruption and brought to justice. In a couple of years the Christian Democrats, the most voted party since the second world war and in government since that time, was dissolved and re-emerged under many different smaller parties which had only the 'Christian' denomination in common. Craxi himself went into exile to Tunisia on 11/2/1993, escaping judicial prosecution. His party had been essential in keeping an 'anti-Communist' government coalition. Now it also fell in disgrace. The entire political system was shaken. Although the opposition parties, most notably the Italian Communist Party, were much less affected by the wave of judicial proceedings, these parties had their own problems of dealing with the post-cold war need for transition, as the communist appeal (particularly the use of its very name) lost appeal among many voters.

Lega Nord undoubtedly profited from the Italian political disarray by being a new party with new faces and little possibility or history of being involved in cases of corruption. Also the direct link with its constituency through the gatherings in Pontida was something the other traditional parties had lost to a great extent. Indeed, in Pontida, on 10/5/1992, the newly elected parliamentarians of LN swore loyalty to 'their people' in addition to the rather symbolic and decadent 'Roman' institutions.

In July, LN even issued the 'leghe', symbolic coins of the '*Repubblica del Nord*', representing the figure of Alberto da Giussano, the symbolic hero of the ancient Northern League (see chapter 4.3.4).

In 1993, perhaps surprisingly, LN took a more federal approach as opposed to an independentist one. With the aim of making their objective more realistic, the leadership of LN opted for a nationwide acceptance of the idea of a strong federalist Italian state. Part of this strategy was the creation of 'Lega Italia Federale' – League for a Federal Italy, whose aim was to spread the idea of federal Italy to the centre and south of the country. Some southern leagues, some in opposition to LN and some supporting its ideas, did indeed emerge in certain regions, but had very limited success.

The shift of emphasis can also be justified by opportunistic reasons. An alliance between Bossi and the emergent Berlusconi was in sight, aiming at reaching the government of the country. As both Forza Italia (Berlusconi's party) and the other potential ally, Alleanza Nazionale³⁰, were focussing on a sentiment of Italianess, therefore unity of the country, federalism, could have become the common denominator.

1993 was also the year when LN got involved in its first legal problem linked to corruption. Alessandro Patelli, close collaborator of Bossi and administrator of LN was arrested. LN's sources understandably downplayed this episode and made it sound more as if Patelli was a victim of a series of unfortunate circumstances and that Bossi was not aware of any information on the matter.

By the beginning of 1994, the alliance with Berlusconi and Fini (from Alleanza Nazionale) was established. During the second congress of LN (4-6/2/1994) in Milan, Bossi clearly spoke as if LN would soon be in the government. And in March 1994, LN indeed won the national election in alliance with Forza Italia and, indirectly, with Alleanza Nazionale. In terms of number of parliamentarians, Lega Nord was at this point the largest political party Italy with a total of 180 parliamentarians. However, as agreed before the election, Berlusconi would be the prime minister of the government.

³⁰ National Alliance in English. This party is the successor of Movimento Sociale Italiano with clear neo-fascist orientation. Its very name was taken from '*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*' (known also as '*Salò Republic*') established by Mussolini and the Germans in the North of Italy in 1943 when the dictator was dismissed by the king of Italy towards the end of the Second World War.

How could a coalition be made up of separatists such as LN, even though partially transformed into federalists, of populists naming themselves after a typical football stadium expression, 'Forza Italia', and of former fascists always holding onto a strong feeling of Italian nationhood? The answer is that that this was the only possibility to get into government for each of these parties; alone they could not have made it. However, their particular interests and political programmes were hardly similar. For LN, the important issue was to make as soon as possible, a change in the constitution in a federalist sense. Particularly fiscal federalism, meaning leaving to the regions the power to tax and use the taxes locally was an important concern for LN. Unemployment and modernization of judicial and school institutions were also mentioned in the LN's documents of the time. 'Federalismo subito!' – Federalism now! - was the slogan used in the regular Pontida gathering in April 1994. Lega Nord was in the government of the country!

The slightly disappointing results of the European election, 6.6% of the votes cast for LN, did not affect the league as much as the perhaps most dramatic division inside party. Professor Miglio, who had been proclaimed as the ideological brain of LN, decided to leave the party at the time of the formation of the government, in contrast with the soft line adopted by Bossi. In the Pontida gathering of May 1994, the two 'souls' of LN, the independentist and the federalist, became more and more apparent. The former was the original founder of the party. The latter was more of a strategic choice adopted in order to gain more real power and possibly reach the objectives of the party. However, the division was felt and this put a lot of pressure on Bossi to provide results as soon as possible.

These results were not forthcoming, and just before Christmas of the same year, on 21/12/1994, LN withdrew the confidence for Berlusconi's government, provoking its collapse. Among the official reasons given for this action included the "not convinced adherence to the European Union" by Berlusconi's government (Fassini 1996:114-116). Ending LN's first experience in government after only half a year was a very dramatic and difficult decision which cost LN not only an opportunity to try to change Italy 'from above', but then also lost some key figures (see below) and as many as 50 parliamentarians, who decided to change to other party groups, mainly to Forza Italia, after LN withdrew the confidence from the government. The decision to leave the government is to be seen as part of the internal debate over independence or federalism, hardliners and compromisers.

In any case, LN had at this point become a mainstream political force that could no longer be ignored or underestimated. The third extraordinary federal congress of LN, taking place in Milan on 10-12/2/1995 saw the participation of many leaders of other political parties and foreign delegations' representatives.

While LN gave, together with the centre-left, a 'technical' vote of confidence to a new government presided by Lamberto Dini, composed only of 'experts', leaving out political figures in order to lead to electoral reforms and then elections, new challenges were just ahead for LN. During this occasion, on 24/1/1995, Bossi used, for the first time in the Parliament, the word 'secession'. Then, contrary to this move, in March 1995, the federal assembly changed the name of Lega Nord into 'Lega Italia Federale' giving great impetus to the federal idea and leaving aside much of the nationalist propaganda. Giancarlo Pagliarini, a distinguished figure of this period, was appointed to preside over the 'Polo di Centro Liberal-democratico Federalista', another tool to trying to get more consent among the moderate population. However, less than a month later, on 1/4/1995, in San Pellegrino Terme the first independentist congress took place, organised by some LN parliamentarians. At this congress, Pagliarini launched 'operazione libertà' – operation freedom - aimed at "promoting an alternative to the neo-fascist right of Berlusconi and Fini, from which, the small and medium businesses, the artisans could not received those needed and urgent reforms that, giving a boost to their activities, would re-launch the economy of the country" (Fassini 1996:121). This was, shown earlier, not the first time that LN's rhetoric addressed this segment of the population. However, it is relevant to highlight that Pagliarini tends to include the whole country, not only the North, and to directly attack the previous (and, as shown below, the future) allies.

As Pagliarini pulled the league in a federalist, nationwide party direction, the federal assembly of Turin, on 28/4/1995, established the Parliament of Mantova (named after the city in which the parliament would be located). This parliament was to be composed by all representatives of LN elected in any institution, national or local. The first seating took place in June, whereas in July, in Pontida, in front of a crowd of 10,000 (figure estimates of LN), the birth of the third pole³¹ was announced, the 'Polo del Guerriero' – the warrior's pole. Again, this brought back more aggressive language and the secessionist aspirations. Bossi seemed to go that way,

³¹ In addition to the traditional left and right

too. The word ‘secession’ was used more often, resulting in legal investigation for attacking the unity of the state, and therefore the Constitution. On 21/12/1995, Bossi even placed an ultimatum to the national Parliament: “federalist state or secession”.

On 24/3/1996, just a month before the election, a crowd of 40.000 (according to LN’s estimates) approved the Constitution of Padania. This was certainly a turning point, when the secessionist line prevailed. On 21/4/1996, LN scored well in the election where the party ran on its own, slightly increasing the number of parliamentarians and votes of 1992, the previous election where LN run without alliances³². Moreover, the local elections, a month later, gave LN the control over 96 towns. Spectacularly, LN’s mayors refused to be sworn in at the *Prefettura*³³. As *prefetti* are representatives of the state, LN wanted to show that city mayors are not accountable to any national authority, but only to the local citizens who have elected them.

These and other spectacular actions described later are explained by either a feeling of extreme confidence that LN had reached a considerable amount of support and political experience or, not necessarily alternatively, by a feeling of being under threat by the new nationalism put forward by Berlusconi, who was gaining increasingly support in the northern regions as well.

Among other actions, LN established a ‘Government of the Sun’, a sort of a shade to the national government³⁴. LN’s parliamentarians did not participate to the 50th anniversary of the Republic, and finally established Comitato di Liberazione della Padania – Committee for the liberation of the Padania.³⁵ Roberto Maroni became the president of this committee and, above all, a prominent figure of LN from then on. Going a step further from the previous actions of LN members, Maroni even invited the mayors elected in LN lists to dispossess *Prefetti* of buildings belonging to the municipalities they administered.

³² The 1994 elections are difficult to compare as Lega Nord ran under the same symbol of Forza Italia thus making it difficult to discern the intention of the voters to choose either of the parties.

³³ *Prefetture* are the state offices in charge of local public order and supervising elections. Their heads are called *Prefetti* and are directly accountable to the Ministry of Interior.

³⁴ The name was also chosen as a “bright” alternative to the so called Shade Government of the major opposition party.

³⁵ This name is consciously linked to the usual committee of liberation typical of countries that are obtaining independence from a foreign or internal oppressor. In Italy a committee of liberation existed at the end of the fascist period and the Second World War.

At this point, LN increasingly made the case for secession in its actions and rhetoric. This prompted a verbal reaction from the highest state authorities that had been quite silent so far. Then President of the Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, and the Minister of Interior, Giorgio Napolitano, made it clear that secession was not an option under the present constitutional fundamentals.

Bossi counteracted by accusing the media very strongly, especially the TV, of deforming the information regarding LN. He even threatened to destroy the RAI (Radiotelevisione Italiana) antennas in the areas administered by LN. Bossi again came under pressure from the judiciary. In three separate prosecutions, he was accused of instigating criminal activities and offence to public officials.

The only voice within LN who had been strongly against this hard line was the one of Irene Pivetti, previous president of the lower parliamentary chamber. She did not escape the strong discipline and hierarchy inside LN and was expelled in September 1996, just two days before LN started the events around a proclamation of independence.

Indeed from the 13th through the 15th of September 1996, a series of public events along the river Po led to the speech in Venice where the Declaration of Independence (see annex 2) was read and approved. However, Padania never even got close to actual independence and this turned out to be, depending on one's point of view, a strong symbolic event, or a failed demonstration of power. The mainstream media calculated that only one seventh of the 4 million people LN claimed, had participated to this three-day event.

Whatever the actual meaning of this event, the reaction of the state was at the same time discrete and strong. Towards the end of the year, special police searched some of the premises of LN. Maroni was reported by LN sources to faint while attempting to stop it and Bossi reported to be punched, despite being both Parliament members. However, with most of the media still ridiculing LN's actions and rhetoric as a kind theatrical and its support being by no means overwhelming, the state did not have to take any major action. At no point the threat of secession emerged as a real and immediate risk.

During the third federal congress of LN in Milan on 14-16/2/1997 Bossi moderated the tone dramatically. Although in principle he still aimed to make Padania secede from Italy, he also clearly stated that the way to do this was to seek consensus within the framework of the Italian constitution, the constitution needing revision “in all its parts”. For this revision, Bossi clarified that a procedure determined by the Constitution itself (article 138) was needed.

During the revision period, Padania needed to continue the development of proper institutions of an independent state. Indeed, in May 1997 LN created Guardia Nazionale Padana – the Padanian National Guard, an unarmed group which would keep order in future Padania.

On 25/5/1997, LN organised its own referendum within the northern regions. LN claimed that 4.833.863 people voted (2 million in Lombardy), of which 97% agreed with the question: “Do you want Padania to become an independent and sovereign federal republic?”.

Also on 26/10/1997, LN organised elections for the Parliament of Padania. This parliament has been until then composed of representatives of LN in

various institutions, but now LN asked the ‘Padanians’ to elect its own representatives to its parliament. Again, both the parliament and the elections did not have any recognition from the Italian or foreign states. Only Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, at that time a very well known extreme right politician from Russia, was reported to have participated to the first meeting of the assembly (9/11/1997) and recognised it as legitimate. The elections initiative turned out to be rather significant as 6.026.000 persons were reported to have voted to elect the 210 parliamentarians from several lists, such as Padanian Communist, Padanian Catholics, Padanian Right, or lists whose names referred to environmental, farming and other interest groups. A few days later, the police carried out 40 search warrants at LN’s premises.

LN confirmed good but not excellent electoral performance in some northern towns at the administrative elections in 1997 (16/11) and 1998 (24/5). It re-confirmed some of the mayors,

***Votes from the referendum
for the independence of Padania***

Nazione	Voters
Lombardia	2,032,752
Veneto	1,049,248
Friuli	220,355
Piemonte	798,447
Liguria	181,553
Val d’Aosta	3,645
Trentino	53,337
Emilia	189,663
Romagna	25,770
Trieste	2,037
Sud Tirolo	3,305
Toscana	11,871
Marche	1,138
Umbria	752
Total	4,833,863

lost a few cities and gained some new ones. At least in Lombardy, the number of LN members increased from 19,000 in 1995 to 23,500 two years later with more than 500 local sections (La Padania, 31/3/1998).

At the same time, the media attention had moved increasingly towards Silvio Berlusconi, who, while still struggling through several legal proceedings and an electoral defeat, was preparing a come-back assisted by his enormous media power and the internal divisions in the left-centre government. In fact, Berlusconi owned (and still does) 3 of the main national TV channels, several large newspapers and magazines, and a big part of the advertisement market.

On 21/1/1998, Bossi was given a 13 month sentence (with suspension of detention) due to a speech he made in 1995 linked to instigation of criminal activities. Two days later, 20,000 demonstrators (prominent LN's members) protested in Bergamo. LN accused their detractors of applying old laws, issued during the fascist period, and which were, in LN's opinion, against the Constitutional provisions protecting the freedom of expression.

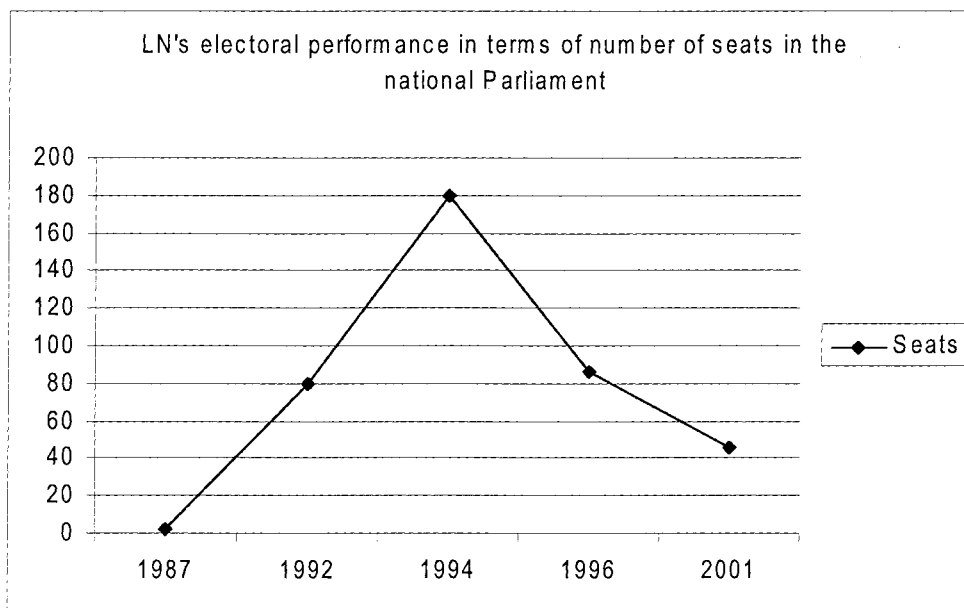
There were two extraordinary federal congresses in 1998. One on 27-29/3/1998 and the second a few months after the elections, on 24-25/10/1998. In the latter the statute of LN is modified. Notably, the name returns to be 'Lega Nord per l'Indipendenza della Padania'.

During the following period and up to the 2001 election, LN tried to consolidate its presence. New initiatives such as the establishment of a Padanian bank, called Credinord, or the promotion of private schools, called Scuola della Padania – Padanian schools (at least two were established), and even the creation of a football 'national' team, 'nazionale padana', took place during these years.

2.2.3 From 2000 onwards: The third phase: decline or mainstreaming?

It is difficult to give an accurate assessment of the latest period of LN both because it is so close to the time of writing and for the fact that as of 2001, LN returned to the government of Italy, winning the election in alliance, again, with Berlusconi and Alleanza Nazionale. However, LN received one of the worst electoral performances in its history, only 46 members entered the parliament. As the title suggests, it is difficult to see whether LN's

leadership is now heading towards a sort of mainstream national party, thus losing its elements of radicalism, or if it is going to decline, or both.



LN had been in alliance with Berlusconi earlier on as well, but that experience was brief and ended disastrously for both. Why did LN again join forces with Berlusconi? In Pontida, on 4/6/2000, Bossi states that "Secession now is impossible and therefore frustrating" (Bossi 2000). It seems that at this point, LN regarded it as essential to be in the government of the country in order to achieve some of the objectives necessary to realize the Padanian project. Devolution became a key word. In the same speech, Bossi referred to the visit of Bill Clinton in Italy as having "showed the way" towards devolution of power from the centre to the regions (or 'nations') as in the USA.

Bossi joined the Berlusconi-led alliance with a clear pact of allowing federalist reforms during its government, starting with 'devolving' powers to the regions. Bossi directly took charge of the newly created ministry of 'devolution'. In fact, the centre-left government had in the previous legislature passed a constitutional change that allowed more autonomy for the regions. That constitutional procedure included a referendum which was successful in ratifying the change. However, LN criticized the content of the reform, judging it too limited, almost fake. Bossi, as minister, launched a new bill in parliament allowing for more changes, although its content was still quite far from creating a federal state, not to mention a divided Italy.

At the beginning of the third millennium LN seems to be a much weaker party due to its poor electoral performance, which makes LN no longer indispensable for the ruling coalition. Contrary to the first experience, Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale can now hold a majority in the Parliament even if LN pulls back, as they previously did. Still, the presence of LN in the parliament allows for a more comfortable majority, which Berlusconi is likely to want to keep. However, LN is no longer in the position of taking radical actions both because it is itself in the government of the country, therefore losing an important enemy-role, and because of its relatively small weight in the Parliament, and perhaps in terms of its popularity.

The feeling inside LN can perhaps be better observed in the speeches of its leaders. In Bossi's intervention in Pontida (17/6/2001), it is possible to observe some important elements. First, perhaps with some regret or just in order to justify more moderate immediate ambitions, Bossi reiterated the fact that if Italy would not have managed to join the Euro, an independent Padania would have now been a reality. As his argument goes, the Italian state would have been in serious economic difficulties, thus creating the environment for secession. A regret? Bossi states that in the short term, LN can only force the government to pass laws that would give regions more competencies and start working for the federalist reform of the State. Bossi also restates LN's aversion to unregulated immigration, drug liberalization policies and recognition of homosexuality. LN stands for a traditional family and attacks 'Europeism' which in LN's opinion gives the central bodies of the EU too much power, creating a sort of super-state. Bossi claims that the left dominates the European political scene, governing with a sort of 'enlightened despotism'. He affirms that only nation-states allow democracy, arguing that there is no democracy without a nation-state. He also re-affirms the importance of the 'natural society' and 'Aristotle's world of natural links'. (Bossi 2001)

LN got into government and lost the election because of Berlusconi. It is quite clear that the 2001 electoral campaign, centred on one person, diverted a number of votes towards Forza Italia, Berlusconi's party. This government enjoys such a majority that it is likely to reach the end of the legislature of 5 years. LN has to deal with this new situation and is likely to aim to get as many positions as possible in the state apparatus, especially those that are linked to regional powers. It is now only a matter of speculation whether LN will come out of this five year electoral period seriously weakened by the fact of being much less radical, or whether it will be empowered by having passed important laws and having occupied important positions

in the Italian bureaucracy. Obviously, it is unlikely that LN can become a nation-wide mainstream party without completely changing its nature. Its nature is that of a separatist movement (Padanian nationalist), but it has to work together for 5 years with two Italian nationalist parties: the neo-fascists of Alleanza Nazionale, some of whose members are still claiming that Istria (now part of Slovenia) should be ‘returned’ to Italy, and Forza Italia, whose very name promotes a sense of unity in the country. Will they allow any serious federalist reform?

In my opinion, it will be of particular importance to see two issues evolve during the current five year governmental mandate. First, the question of the economic divide between north and south. It is clear that LN wants to keep resources where they are produced, therefore limiting the fiscal drain from North to South. If they succeed in this venture and the South does not reduce this resource gap, LN will still have powerful arguments to use in the next election. The second is to occupy positions in strategic places of the public administration and redraw the competencies, giving more power to the regions where, notably in the north, LN is likely to have more weight in relations to other parties. Particularly important for LN will be to influence the curricula of the national education system or at least to delegate curricula management to the regions. So far, the state curricula have emphasised an anti-fascist, unitary vision of the Italian nation. The rehabilitation of the formerly fascist party of Alleanza Nazionale has also meant that some revisionism is under way, particularly of history books with reference to the fascist period. LN could also take the chance to revise the ‘official’ history, giving less importance, or at least putting in a different light, the process of national unification as well as the myth of the Roman empire and emphasising the period of separate city states. It goes without saying that during the current legislature, LN, as a governmental force, needs to obtain some kind of major achievements that it can sell to the electorate as its own. Otherwise, why would a Padanian need LN if the party is only capable of small reforms that other parties too could deliver?

3 The Environment: a fertile ground for Lega Nord?

3.1 Introduction

It is now time to test the case of LN against the theoretical framework developed in the first section. One of the arguments of the first section was that in order to understand nations

today, we should look at how nationalist movements make use of them. In other words we need to look at the nation building process as defined in chapter 5.6.

The first task is to look at the environment, from which nationalist movements gather what I called the resources to attempt to build or reinforce a nation. In the case of LN, the environment is mainly defined by the Italian situation. Particular emphasis will be placed on examining the identities, cultures, and the political and economic conditions.

3.2 The physical environment

On the English language site of LN, one chapter is titled: 'the geographical fraud'. LN argues that calling Italy a peninsula is erroneous and instrumental to creating the idea of naturally formed borders. In fact, LN states, only 130,000 km² of current day Italy are peninsular, whereas the remaining 120,000 are not and are instead part of the European continental land mass. LN argues that when talking about the northern part of the peninsula, it would be more correct to refer only to Tuscany or Marche.

Also the Alps, which are traditionally assumed to delimit Italy from the rest of Europe, are, according to LN, more a 'pivot-point' than a barrier. Most populations on both sides of the Alps have similar languages or are part of the same ethnic groups, such as the Occitans, the Harpitans, the Walser, the Romansch-Ladins, the Baiuvars and the Slovenes. Most trade in the past occurred through the Alps. At the beginning of the Italian State, the roads through the Alps were in better condition than those connecting the North to Rome.

The concept of peninsula and the role of the Alps are two of the main arguments that use the physical environment to challenge the existing nation, the Italians, in order to promote another one, the Padanians. Indeed, geography has powerful symbolism especially for those nations that can count on a favourable physical environment. In Europe, Great Britain is arguably a country whose very fact of being surrounded by sea may have favoured the building of a British nation. This is what I would call a favourable environment for nationalist.

It is true and equally fair to say that this kind of environment might favour the historical development of a 'natural' nation, that is a group that interacts and develops some common features. However, if we focus on the nation building process, as the process implemented by a particular nationalist movement at a certain point of time, the physical environment can be

used as an argument to justify the existence of a particular nation. As can be learned from this case, there can be two nationalist movements, e.g. one promoting Italy and one Padania, giving two alternative readings of the same environment.

Again, this reflection does not automatically exclude the possibility that nations need a long history to exist, or even that nations are somehow natural. In the latter case, people would have to determine which nationalist movement is right. Instead, in a constructivist approach, both movements can be right, or can give a subjective truth about the environment. The goal for the movement is to get people believe what they claim in their arguments. In the end, it does not matter if we use objective or subjective, constructed or determinist interpretations, what counts is that nationalist movements, especially in favourable locations (as Britain or Italy) will try to use the physical environment to build or reinforce their nation. No matter if their effort is to 'rediscover' an ancient truth, or to 'construct' a new one.

3.3 Existing social and political identities: a historical excursus

For many years, the Eurobarometer, a statistical tool of the European Commission, has shown that the Italians are among the most prone to give up their national symbols in favour of the European ones. They are also among those countries with a higher percentage of people who feel more European than Italian. The Eurobarometer also shows that local identities are very strong, often more than the national one.

Indeed, the sense of national identity in Italy is much weaker than in many other states (Gibson 1994). This has some historical explanations which, as explained in chapter 4.3.4, LN exploits to its best. Italy has indeed a short history as a unified State and, more significantly, a long history divided into many states. Since the collapse of the Romans the inhabitants of what is now called Italy have belonged to many different states, sometimes, as large as the 'Regno delle due Sicilie' which included the whole south and Sicily, sometimes in truly small city states. Only in 1861 did the kingdom of Piemonte successfully manage to unify most of Italy under one ruler. However, the unification of the territory did not mean that the 'Italians' were unified under one nation. Most historians and scholars studying Italian nationalism agree that this did not happen until the 20th century.³⁶

³⁶ See for example Haddock (1996), Gibson (1994), and Hobsbawm (1992).

Even the “[..] Italian question did not exist as a political reality before 1796. The Italian Jacobins were the first to pose the creation of a united Italy as a concrete political project, and their concept of the nation was derived from the French Revolution” (Lyttelton 1993:63). Italian nationalism, as elsewhere in Europe, originated as literary nationalism to become only later political nationalism. (Ibid: 72).

More importantly, the nation building process in Italy was a particularly top-down process. A very restricted elite was always leading the process. This elite included political thinkers like Mazzini, political leaders like Cavour and soldiers like Garibaldi, but in no way included the vast majority of the population. It is true that in 1848 there were a few popular insurrections in some cities rebelling against the ‘foreign oppressor’, but they were mainly guided by the Savoia Kingdom or a few intellectuals. In at least one case, the one of Pisacane in Sapri (in the Kingdom of Naples), small groups of insurrectionists were even attacked and massacred by the local peasants. (Ibid: 96)

Denis Mack Smith made it clear years ago that unified Italy contained scarcely any Italians. Certainly no more than 2.5 per cent of them were fluent in Italian - and the proportion outside Tuscany and Rome was very much lower. [King] Victor Emmanuel spoke for preference a Piedmontese dialect, and when Cavour declared ‘Je suis Italien avant tout’, he said it in French. Mazzini and Garibaldi were really very peripheral figures. Sicilian and south Italian peasants had certainly no concept of being Italian (when Garibaldi told them about ‘Italia’, they thought he was talking about his mistress). (Gibson 1994:179)

The reality of the newly unified Italy in 1861 was of 0.06% of the population completing the first 8 years of school, while 78% were not able to read and write (with much higher differences in the south). For almost none of the population, was Italian the first language (Romano 1977:32-33). The state did not succeed until well into the 20th century to enforce mass schooling. Sorella (1982:291-300) even argues that only recently national television programming has succeeded in constructing a popular spoken Italian that can be used outside the domestic and face-to-face sphere of communication.

In such an environment the Italian nation, as an identity group, had very big difficulties to overcome. The identities remained for a very long time very local (Gibson 1994). The 20-year fascist period strongly attempted to create a sense of nation in Italy, recalling the ‘glorious’

Roman empire and prospecting a nation with new imperial ambitions, but, although embraced by many of the middle class and the rising petite bourgeoisie, it did not convince the mass of the population (Brierley and Giacometti 1996:174).

In any case, the fascist's and monarchy's disastrous fall during the Second World War virtually nullified the effects of 20 years of fascist propaganda. For a short period, it seemed that anti-fascism, connected to the 'heroic' resistance movement, could have been the 'founding myth' of the state (ibid: 176). Even nowadays the 25th of April, the date of liberation from the fascist regime, is a national holiday.

However, also as a consequence of the cold war and the rise of the communist movement, the Italian people ended up divided not only in regions, but also into ideologies, namely the socialist-communist, the Christian democrat, the fascist and what I call the 'indifferentist'. Although each of these tended to be predominant in certain regions of the country, they were truly country wide identity groups.

The fascist movement has been rather marginal in the last decades. Although, in principle, a good number of people in Italy would have supported a revival of this movement³⁷, the fascist defeat in the war made the promotion of any fascist idea a taboo, besides the reestablishment of a fascist party being illegal under the constitution. Therefore, people joining the fascist identity group were very few, often extreme or ever silent. This has changed recently with the rise of Alleanza Nazionale and its rapid acceptance in the political spectrum, although this has been coupled by a moderation of references to fascist ideas by the same party.

The socialist-communists, instead, represented, up till the 1980's, roughly one third of the population and were mainly grouped in the Italian Communist Party, the second most voted party in Italy and the strongest communist party in Western Europe. Until well into the 1980's, this party had a very good link with its membership, and the latter were incredibly loyal to the ideology so much so that it was very difficult to switch from communist to non-communist. The socialists, although less in number, might be comparable, but only in the early period. Together with some other small parties (namely the liberals, the republicans and the social-democrats,), the socialist slowly moved to support the Christian Democrats. In the

³⁷ A quite common saying in the Italian political environment is: "In Italy the fascist represent an irrelevant majority".

80's, under the lead of Bettino Craxi, the Italian Socialist Party radically transformed itself from a workers' party to a conservative party with strong links with the industries.

The main opposing ideology was promoted by the Christian Democrats, a party strongly linked to the powerful Catholic Church and the American government. Although Christianity was a common feature of the party, it was not the distinctive one. Many members from other ideologies also embraced the catholic creed. It cannot be honestly said that free market and democratic principle were distinctive features either. Although used as such in Christian Democrats' propaganda, communist, fascist and 'indifferentists' were, with only few exceptions, also assuming these same values. What really distinguished this group from the others was the rejection of the communists. The great majority of priests in almost every town would perform (often in good faith) acts of persuasion that went beyond religious matters trying to convince church attendants that communists were something evil that would have brought dictatorship and despair and that voting Christian Democrats was a necessity to save themselves. This was a very powerful identity building tool. Even nowadays, when only a tiny minority of Italians would define themselves as communist, Berlusconi does not hesitate to use the anticommunist propaganda to support his arguments and demonise his enemies.

Finally, perhaps the majority of the population would not mind voting for any party as long as their personal immediate interests were met. As argued by Haddock (1996:111) and by Brierley and Giacometti (1996:177), one problem was that the Christian Democratic Party (and later the Italian Socialist Party led by Bettino Craxi) imposed a system of patronage creating a quasi-symbiotic relationship between parties in the government and interests, and related themselves and the voters with a system of clientelism: "You give me the vote and I give you something in return". A consensus built on interest rather than ideology and/or ideal could only further alienate citizens from the state and from fellow citizens. Individualism reigned, fuelled by mass consumerism promoted by the mass media and the amazingly fast economic growth of the 60's and 80's³⁸. The result, to put it crudely, was that many Italians did not care about being part of a single nation – lacking a sense of group solidarity beyond the family or friendship circles. Again, although I believe this was a widespread phenomenon, I do not agree that it was exclusively so. The 'indifferentists' did not belong to an ideology based identity group, but others were definitely at the point of spending much of their time

³⁸ These periods were respectively called the first and second Italian miracles.

and resources promoting their own ideology. Some of them, most notably the red brigades, even decided to take violent actions.

Then, by end of the 80's and beginning of the 90's everything changed. I agree with Haddock (1996:118) that "developments within the Italian state have clearly reflected wider upheavals in European and world politics". Particularly, the end of the cold war was crucial for many in creating a sense of loss of identity. The communist party went through a transformation, changing name, symbols, and above all, ways of doing politics: it no longer aimed to radically change society, but to slowly transform it, following the moderate social democrat movements. This, together with other factors (such as the reduced links to the grassroots) alienated many party supporters, and attracted others, but above all changed in many cases the relationship between the supporters and the party. For many, it was no longer a matter of being communist, but a matter of voting, or not, for the (ex) communist party.

The same results, but with a different story, affected the Christian Democrats. The main problem was that they almost lost their 'enemy', the communists. To make things worse for the Christian Democrats and its allied parties, a pool of judges, freed from the cold war restrictions³⁹ brought to justice a series of corruption and mafia related cases involving the leadership of these parties. The result was a disaster: famous leaders, such as Craxi, went into exile, others were imprisoned or were 'politically terminated (some even committed suicide). All large parties changed their names and dramatically lost support, not only in electoral terms, but also as identity groups. Lacking an enemy and hit by, at least the doubt, that most of their leaders were corrupt and some linked to Mafia, many people lost their faith in their party identity groups (these being Christian Democrats, or Socialist, or sometimes even simply Christians). (Brierley and Giacometti 1996)

In an environment where a good number of people were lost in terms of belonging to a specific political identity group, LN and, later, Silvio Berlusconi came onto the scene⁴⁰. It was a very favourable social and political environment. In its nation building process LN initially exploited the regional feeling of belonging and then took advantage of the changed political

³⁹ It is now clear that during the cold war a number of mechanisms were enacted by the top governmental representatives, the secret service, the CIA and American government to impede any access to power by the Italian Communist Party. Even the setting-up of an illegal military organisation, such as Gladio or the establishment of occasional alliances with Mafia organisations were used to maintain the status-quo even at the expenses of truly democratic life, including a free and independent judiciary. For an account of this see for example Haddock (1996).

circumstances of the 80's and 90's. In particular they took advantage of the decadence of ideology and the related disruption of the main political identity groups, namely those around the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party.

Moreover, it is argued that LN also addressed the large group of 'indifferentists', even to the point of breaking its local links. In particular they tried to address and represent those tax evaders who were threatened by radical policies to reduce the tax evasion phenomenon enacted by the government in the 90's. More easily found among the small employers in craft industries, manufacturing and commerce, these people were often among those with few ideals, not to mention a sense of state. They were often voters of the Christian Democratic Party and the Italian Socialist Party, which were almost disbanded as a consequence of the judicial investigations. In search of the new party, it is argued that they, some of them (especially in the north), first turned to LN and then to Forza Italia. (Brierley and Giacometti 1996)

3.4 The economic divide

Since the time of the economic boom, during the 60's, Italy has enjoyed a relatively wealthy economic situation. Its total GNP is among the six biggest in the world and the GNP per capita is 22.100 U.S. dollars⁴¹. It is a highly industrialised country with a growing financial sector. Although Italy has some large industrial and financial groups, such as FIAT or ENI, its economy is characterised by a high presence of small businesses.

However, this wealth is not well distributed. A striking difference in average income is visible between the northern regions, with the addition of the area of Rome, and the southern regions with the inclusion of the two islands Sicily and Sardinia. The average GNP per capita of a person in Milan is almost double that of a person in Calabria in the south. Also the unemployment rate is much higher in the south, whereas there are large sectors in the northern economy that are underemployed.

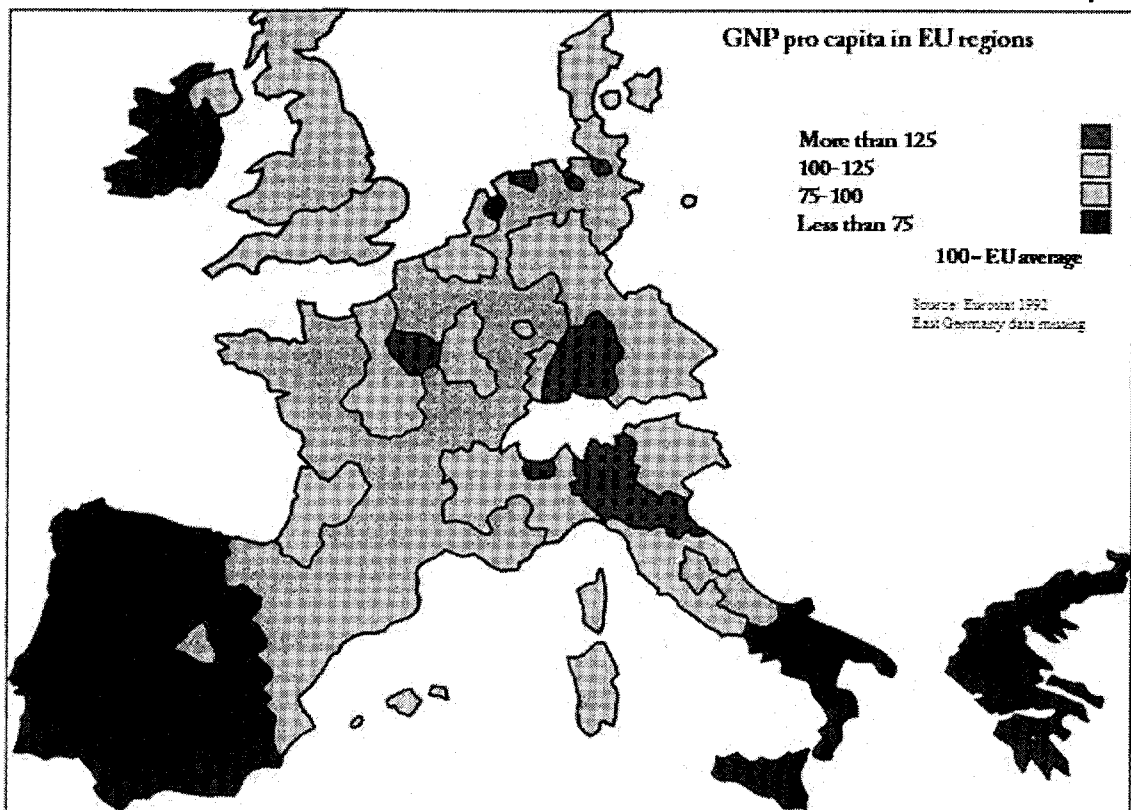
In the European Union, perhaps only Germany (and Spain to a more limited extent) has such a clear geographical divide. Germany has a large economic discrepancy between East and

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that Silvio Berlusconi actually used the football expression "scendere in campo" (literally - come down into the playing field) when he decided to enter politics. For the record, this sentence was often used by Benito Mussolini in his speeches.

West; however, this has a much clearer explanation which derives from the division of the areas under two regimes, divided for forty years, not only by a simple border, but by the rather impenetrable 'iron curtain'.

On the contrary, Italy has been united under a single state for over a century. This problem, known historically as 'Questione meridionale', has persisted ever since. State policies aimed at changing this status, that is, enriching the South, have been enacted constantly, albeit with different impetus. The reasons for this situation have been the subject of many books that often discuss the question of the different historical and economic development of the two regions before the establishment of the Italian State, the presence of the Mafia and ineffective policies. To discuss and analyse these and other possible reasons for the economical divide is outside the scope of this paper. What is important is to note that Lega Nord has used this 'environmental' aspect in its nation building process, as we shall see in 4.2.

The economic differences in Europe



.... And in Italy

⁴¹ Estimated figure for the year 2000 at purchasing power parity (CIA 2002)



3.5 The role of mass-media

Contrary to older nationalist movement, LN began and developed in what many call an information society. The importance of information, and particularly, of the mass-media is very much studied at the moment. It has particular relevance in relation to its use in politics. There is little doubt that the advent of Berlusconi is partly a product of the control he has through his media empire.

LN made and could make little use of mass media as its own instrument of propaganda. Lacking control of any national media, and not enjoying the sympathy of the most prominent journalists, nor the support of major power groups, they could only issue their own, small scale media in forms of journals, radio, etc. However, LN often received 'negative publicity', but still publicity, from several newspaper articles and speeches of prominent political adversaries or even state authorities. This might have alienated a number of potential supporters, but at the same time reinforced the hard core and attracted a number of people against the mainstream power. It is difficult to say how intentional it is, but LN's leader Umberto Bossi has almost always used a language with very strong, vulgar tones, and often accused people or institutions directly. This kind of language has certainly attracted journalistic reports, even if often in negative terms. Undoubtedly, many highly educated

people have been disgusted to hear these kinds of political speeches, but for many ordinary people these kinds of populist and often very angry tones are actually what they want to hear from a politician.

4. The nation building process

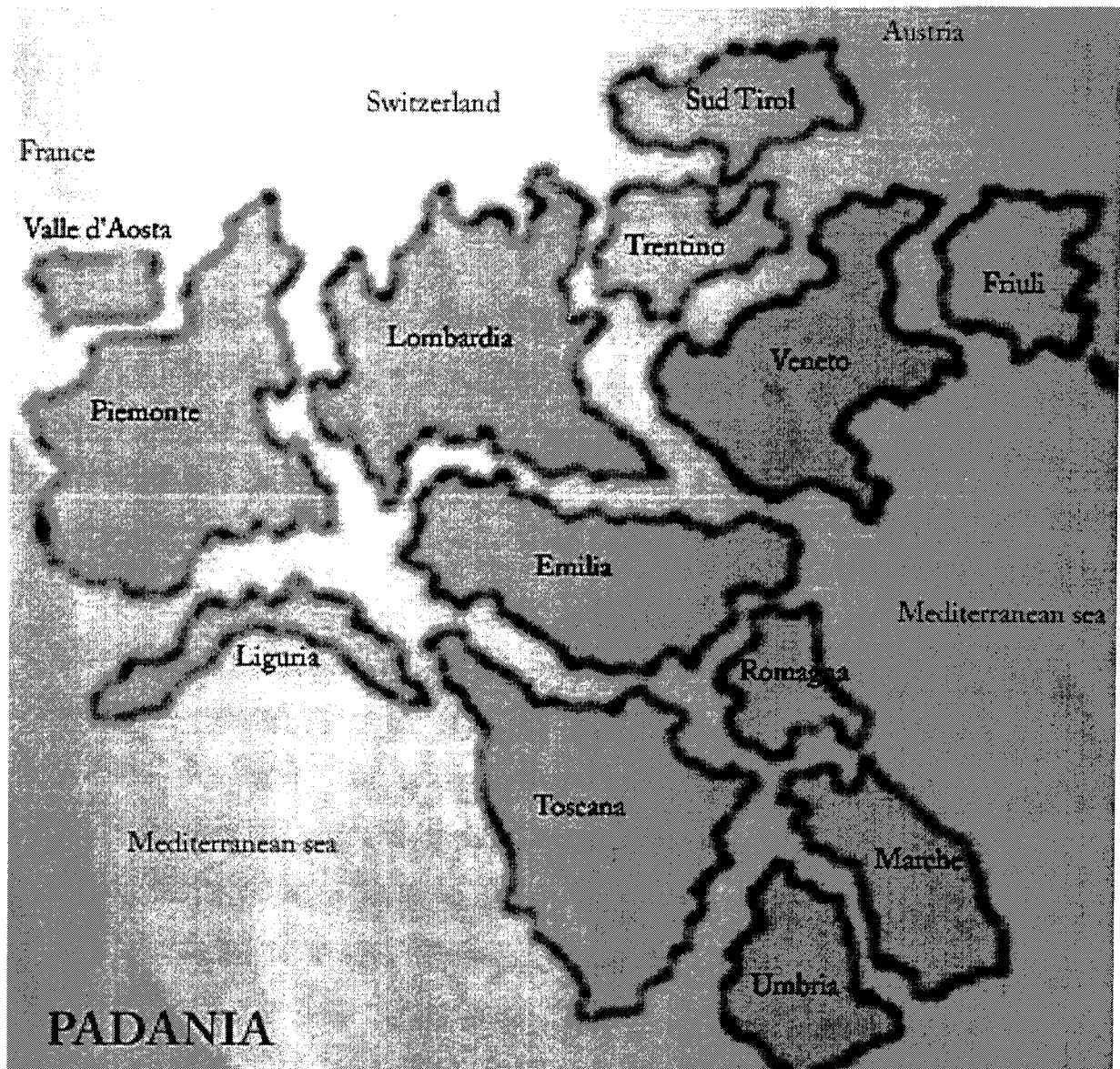
In the first section of this paper, the nation building process was compared to the more general group building process and to the generation of a corporate identity. These are well known processes studied in disciplines such as education or business administration. This chapter will look at how LN has used, consciously or unconsciously, the methods of group building. Particular attention will be given to identity symbols, the prospected advantages of joining the identity group and the issue of language. But first, it is useful to examine what is the target group of LN and how it has been defined. The target group, that is the people subjected to the process of group building, is very important as it limits the possibility to enter or exit the group.

4.1 Target group

Who are the actual people who should be part of the Padanian nation in the mind of LN leaders?

By looking at the main documents of LN it can be observed that the so called 'Padanians' are those who believe and are believed to be from one of the following regions, or, in LN's terms, nations:

Emilia, Friuli, Liguria, Lombardia, Marche, Piemonte, Romagna, Sudtirolo-Alto Adige, Toscana, Trentino, Umbria, Valle d'Aosta, Veneto, Venezia Giulia. LN intends to build a federation of these 'nations', all of which will have its own league. Similar to the case of the USA, they would then all be one nation as well, namely the Padanians.



What does it mean to be from one of the above mentioned regions, apart from subjective belief? To be born, resident, working in one of these regions? In the 'Provisional Constitution - separation treaty' dated September 1996, it is stated that "All European citizens residing in Padania for five years from the date of this Provisional Constitution acquire Padanian citizenship. Padanian citizenship is comparable with citizenship of other European Union countries". Although the cited document does not currently have any legal value, it states the intentions of LN with regards to who should acquire Padanian citizenship and therefore be allowed to enter the Padanian identity group, that is the Padanian nation. It is worth mentioning that the document states a limit to EU citizen, restricting several other possibilities. Under this provision, a US or Somali citizen can never acquire the Padanian citizenship, not even after a long permanence. On the other hand it is made rather easy for EU citizens to become Padanians. This provision does not establish any additional requirements

such as the knowledge of a language, or family relationship to a Padanian, birth in Padania, etc.

Of course it can be assumed that the document was written more as a propaganda tool than a document that would be realistically implemented as a legal text in the short term. Still, it helps to understand the image LN has of the Padanian citizenry. It is congruent with some racist statements and leaflets produced by LN, which, based on the typical Italian distinction between 'Comunitario' and 'Extra-comunitario' - member or non-member of the European Union -, often affirm that the latter should not be given access and rights in Italy (or future Padania). The other basis for distinction is between the Northerner (or Padanian) and the Southerner, called *Terrone*, a term coined at the time of migration, which derives from the term 'terra' - land, especially farmland. It used to be associated with the migrants of the South leaving the farms to move to the industrialised cities of the north. Based on cultural stereotypes and language accent, it is often possible to make this distinction. More difficult, if not impossible, is making the same distinction on the basis of physical appearance (see also chapter 4.3.5). In any case, this distinction existed before LN came into existence, although the actual border between North and South did not necessarily correspond to the one drawn for Padania.

Clearly, addressing the people from all northern Italy and eventually any EU citizen residing there for over 5 years, is quite a big task, although it is the ultimate one, if the nationalist movement wants to succeed in creating a unified nation. On the basis of various documents⁴², it appears that LN focuses its attention on certain economic and social categories: small businesses, independent professions and retired people, thus excluding for example employees and workers in the industries, the unemployed, migrants and intellectuals.

4.2 The advantages of 'joining' the group

When talking about social identities, we have seen how psychologists regard that in order for an individual to join any kind of social group and identify with it, s/he must perceive some sort of advantage. This advantage can be psychological, social or economic. By psychological I mean related to one's own psychological needs as an individual, such as feeling special or accepted. Social advantages are more related to society, such as the entitlement to certain

⁴² See Fassini (1996), Bossi (2002a, 2002b) and various other speeches available on the same web site.

rights or freedoms (of movement in a territory, to vote and be voted for, to speak freely, etc.). Finally the economic advantage refers to any material gain that an individual obtains by joining a group, such as ownership of a new land, less taxes, better trade possibilities, etc. These advantages, particularly the psychological ones do not have to be conscious, but still may have an effect on convincing the individual to join. Finally, an advantage can be also the termination or the reduction of a disadvantage.

The advantages of joining an identity group (or nation) can be analysed, at least, by the following three aspects: by looking at people's perceptions; by looking at the rhetoric used by the nationalist movement and, obviously, by looking at the changed environmental status that may derive from the existence of the new nation, or even more, a nation-state. In the case of the Padanian nation only the second aspect will be examined. The third is not really assessable in this case, as little if any institutional adjustment has been made with reference to Padania. As for the first one, the limited scope of this paper did not allow the implementation of any survey or qualitative interview to effectively explore this subject as a matter of perception.

As explained earlier, the particular environment of the end of the cold war, as well as, later, by the corruption scandals, created a vacuum in terms of political identities, giving a niche for the creation of new ones, or the reinforcement of existing but less dominant political identities. I believe it is fair to speculate that many disappointed Christians or Communists found in the regional identities a psychological replacement for their need to belong to a strong political group. LN, and its component leagues, initiated a political project that tried to incorporate these re-emerging local identities. In doing so, LN established a series of identity symbols, which are to be examined in the next chapter. LN also envisaged, more or less explicitly, a number of advantages that individuals would receive by joining these local social identities, ultimately the Padanian identity.

If one believes LN's rhetoric it appears clear that, by choosing Padanian as a primary identity, one could gain certain advantages such as - if an independent Padania was reached - paying less taxes - becoming wealthier, having fewer Mafia and lower criminality, less 'extracomunitari', closer institutions and more localism, higher status in Europe, etc., as explained more in detail below.

The first and foremost 'advantage' in LN's rhetoric has been the issue of taxes. Italy, as well as many western countries with established social welfare, has a rather high taxation rate. Equally, it has a rather high rate of tax evasion, especially among the category of small businesses and professionals. This can be a sign of an inappropriate tax collection system, as well as a perceived sense of injustice from those who pay taxes, or a combination of the two. In any case, as soon as LN raised this point among the northern electorate they received a good amount of support. The argument was simple. High taxes are due to the inefficient and large bureaucracy in Rome and to the significant drain of money going to support the South. Indeed, in 1995 the average fiscal drain per capita in Lombardia (the region where Milan is located) was 18,639,000 liras whereas in all southern regions (with the exception of Lazio - where Rome is located) it was between eight and eleven million liras. As the regions included in Padania paid roughly per capita 16.5 million liras on average and in the rest of the regions 10.8 million liras per capita, the argument is simple: even if the resources were evenly, or justly, distributed, an average Padanian pays 6 million liras more in tax per year than an average Southerner. However, the resources are not even equally distributed, as the South has been receiving more payments back than the North. In 1989, the regions from the South received back payments of 3.3 million liras per capita more than they paid, whereas regions in Padania had a 'deficit' of 583,000 liras per capita.

In addition to this, and not without foundation, LN claims that the funds sent to the Southern regions have often been subject to corruption and Mafia, therefore not even helping the development of ordinary people. In the mind of a person thinking of becoming a Padanian, all this means that, with an independent Padania, one would pay fewer taxes and, perhaps have a more efficient state without Mafia infiltration. Quite attractive, one must say.

Another important argument that was slightly lost along the way was Europe. Contrary to many other EU states, Europe and the European Union has been quite a popular topic in Italy. The consensus was that it is of utmost importance to be part of Europe. Despite its economic power, Italy has often been below the European standards on many accounts, such as budget deficit or public debt, arriving at the point that Italy could not fulfil the criteria to join the common currency, the Euro. At that time LN argued that an independent Padania would have no problems meeting these criteria and of being a fully-fledged member of the EU. LN also made a series of political statements on how the future of the EU should look, particularly imagining a Europe of regions. A posteriori, after Italy managed to join the euro currency,

Bossi speculated that if Italy would have been left out of the core European countries that joined the euro, Padania would have quite rapidly succeeded to be independent as a consequence of the economic turmoil caused by this crisis (Bossi 2001). In general, LN has always insisted that Padania is closer to Western Europe than to the South of Italy. “Milan is closer to Paris than it is to Palermo” was one of the important slogans.

4.3 Fostering group identity: the symbols and rituals of Padania

While doing this research, I was amazed by the huge amount of identity symbols that LN has established through the years. They range from institutions to constitutions, from the flag to a fully elaborated common past, etc. Even though I am an Italian citizen, I was not aware of the existence of all of them and instinctively I think of the importance these symbols might have had, or still have, for many people. It is a world full of national symbols. The following is a tentative list divided in categories.

4.3.1 The Padanian institutions

For a moment, let’s pretend that Padania was an independent state. What would be its characteristics according to LN’s existing and planned institutions? I have listed here information retrieved from different LN’s sources. Some of the following ‘institutions’ are already in place, some are only envisaged if Padania would become independent. Some are clearly used as symbols; others are perhaps indirectly used as such. In fact, considering that a formal independence seemed at no time really plausible, I would suggest that some institutions were created more as a symbol of common vision, rather than actually serving the institutional purpose they were created for.

Main information:

<p>Name of the country: Republica Federale Padana (PDN)</p> <p>Capital city: Mantova</p> <p>Component ‘nations’: Emilia, Friuli, Liguria, Lombardia, Marche, Piemonte, Romagna, Sudtirolo-Alto Adige, Toscana, Trentino, Umbria, Valle d’Aosta, Veneto, Venezia Giulia</p> <p>Territory: All northern Italy, starting from Marche, Umbria and Toscana in the south of Padania</p> <p>Citizenship: Anybody who is a European Citizen (of the EU) and has resided in Padania for over 5 years. Padanian citizenship can be cumulated with others from EU.</p> <p>Currency: Lira Padana</p> <p>Population living in Padania: 32,502,000 (Italy: 57,884,017) (ISTAT 2002)</p> <p>Official language: Italian for the federation. The local languages have equal official status in their respective territories⁴³</p> <p>Religion: All religious faiths are free and equal before the law⁴⁴</p>

⁴³ Art. 12 of LN’s Padanian Constitution (Lega Nord 2001)

⁴⁴ Art. 13 of LN’s Padanian Constitution (Ibid.)

State institutions:

Provisional, before independence:

Parliament of Mantova⁴⁵: Established by the federal assembly of the Lega Nord on 28/4/1995. Composed by all LN representatives elected in any institutions (Italian Parliament and local authorities). First meeting 7/6/1995. Presided by Francesco Speroni.

Provisional Government: (the so-called: 'sunshine government'): 13 members headed by Giancarlo Pagliarini (first prime minister), elected by the Parliament 12/5/1996.

Comitato per la Liberazione della Padania (CLP): 11 members elected by the Parliament 12/5/1996. Presided by Roberto Maroni.

After independence, as established in the Constitution of Padania:

National Assembly: Elected by universal and direct suffrage. Two hundred members (the members are divided by regions). Five-year mandate.⁴⁶

Assembly of the Regions: Members nominated by the Regional Governments. Minimum three members per region. Bigger regions send extra representatives for each two million inhabitants.⁴⁷

Federal Assembly: National Assembly and Assembly of the Regions in joint session.⁴⁸

Federal President: Elected by the Federal Assembly. Four year mandate.

Federal Government: Prime Minister elected by National Assembly on the proposal of the Federal President. Ministers nominated and revoked by Federal President on the proposal of the Prime Minister.

Judiciary: Autonomous magistrates subject to all the common principles of modern democracies. Recruitment on a regional basis. Provisions are made for a Supreme Council of the Magistrate presided by the Federal President.⁴⁹

Federal Constitutional Court: 16 judges appointed by the two assemblies responsible to solve controversies subject to constitutional control.⁵⁰

Important dates, documents and events:

24/3/1996: Provisional Constitution

15/9/1996: Declaration of independence, Provisional Constitution (separation treaty) and Bill of Rights

14/9/1997: Date of proclamation of independence

9/11/1997: Date of the first Padanian election for the Parliament

Information tools:

Newspapers/magazines: La Padania (also online – www.lapadania.com)

Radio: Radio Padania Libera (former Radio Varese). On the air since 1990. Only local broadcasting.

A TV-station: TelePadania on the air since 12/10/1998. Only local broadcasting.

Main Web sites: www.leganord.org (official website), www.albertino.net, www.padaniacity.com, www.padaniaportale.com

⁴⁵ See homepage: <http://www.parlamentodellapadania.org/>

⁴⁶ Art. 51-52 of LN's Padanian Constitution (Ibid.)

⁴⁷ Art. 50 of the Padanian Constitution (Ibid.)

⁴⁸ Art. 49 of the Padanian Constitution (Ibid.)

⁴⁹ Art.88-99 of the Padanian Constitution (Ibid.)

Other symbols:

Military service: Voluntary through the Padanian National Guard, a (so far) unarmed militia.
National colour: Green – reminding the Celt tradition. Also symbol of love for the Padanian people (Bossi 2001).

Flag: Sole delle Alpi (the Alps' sun), "constituted by 6 leaves within a circle, of celtic-venetic colour on white background". claimed to be an ancient Celtic symbol used mainly by the inhabited the area around the Alps. According to LN, the flag supposed to symbolize the sun, which in turns means life, light, and all that is pleasant; the life cycle (or the wheel of



placed
The flag is
tribes that
is also
warmth,
life); Jesus

Christ; the David's star (with the six points); a flower, which in turn means beauty, cleanness, life after winter, and in particular the 'Stella Alpina', a flower that grows in the most difficult conditions; the six ethno-linguistic groups of Padania (Italic Celts, Venetians, Germans, Friulans, Ladinos, and Occitan-Arpitans).

National Anthem: 'Va Pensiero' by Giuseppe Verdi⁵¹

Political Parties (list taken from those who participated in the 1997 election to the Padanian Parliament, in parenthesis the number of persons elected in that occasion):
Comunisti Padani (5), Democratici Europei Lavoro Padano (52), Unione Padana Agricoltura Ambiente Caccia Pesca (5), Cattolici Padani (20), Leoni Padani (14), Padania Liberale e Libertaria (12), Liberaldemocratici Forza Padania (50), Destra Padana (27), Altre Liste – other lists (25)

Trade Unions: At present Sindacato Autonomista Lombardo is the only Padanian trade union
The bank institution: CREDIEuroNORD (established in 1999)

The Padanian School: La Scuola Padana was launched as an ambitious programme aimed at giving Padanian children an alternative education to the one given by public (Italian) schools.

Main Padanian Associations:

Orsetti Padani (for children)	Donne Padane (for women)
Movimento Giovani Padani (for youngsters)	Padanassistenza (assistance)
Cattolici Padani (for Catholics)	Umanitaria Padana (for humanitarian aid)
Padani nel Mondo (for Padanians living abroad)	Arte Nord (arts)
Padania Bella (arts)	Padaniambiente (environment)
Volontari Verdi (voluntarism and environment)	Medica Padana (for medical doctors)
Guardia Nazionale Padana (see military service)	Autisti Padani (for car drivers)
Il Collare Verde (for pets lovers)	Collezionisti Padani (for collectionists)
Cacciatori Padani (for hunters)	

Music: The cd-rom produced by LN (1998) contains nine songs whose lyrics recall the traditions and the struggle of the Padanians. The names are: camicia verde (green shirts), libertà... libertà (freedom), Padania guarda avanti (Padania looks forward), la nostra strada (our way), 15 settembre 1996, il sole e il leone (the sun and the lion), il sole delle Alpi (the Alps' sun), città padane (Padanian cities), fuori il tiranno (tyrant away). Some of the melodies and the instruments used remind one of Celtic sounds. Bossi himself declared in more than one occasion the Padanian affinity and friendship with the Irish and, in musical terms with the singer Enja.

And to finish... A Miss Padania is elected every year!

⁵⁰ art.103-106 of the Padanian Constitution (Ibid.)

⁵¹ Interestingly, when the national anthem of Italy was selected, Verdi's composition was among the candidates. *Inno di Mameli* was eventually selected.

4.3.2 The enemy: the symbols of what Padanians are not about

The 'enemy' plays an important role in LN's rhetoric. The main identified enemies of Padania are: the centralist state, the Italian state with all its centralist institutions, the system of national political parties, illegal immigrants, and criminal organisations, especially the Mafia.

Before illustrating each of these in more detail it is useful to reflect on the role of the enemy. The perception of an assumed threat posed by a subject to a specific group is a strong cohesive force for a group. The cold war was used to reinforce the self-identification in the western and eastern blocks. At present, the president of the USA, George W. Bush has, in his rhetoric, insisted on the presence of an 'evil force' threatening the American people, with the obvious objective of strengthening the group identity of the latter. Similar dynamics have occurred in Italy, where, for instance, the Christian Democratic Party's rhetoric insisted on perceived threats from the Communists.

Since its existence, LN has used the enemy rhetoric quite often. Taking advantage of the already existing antipathy towards the political class, LN has grouped all members of national political parties into a sort of symbolic power group, which LN called 'partitocrazia'. Partitocrazia is an enemy, the argument goes, because it wants to keep a centralised state and continue to oppress the freedoms of the northern people, or Padanians. In historical terms it is related to the Romans who oppressed the free tribes of the North. As the reputation of political parties became worse, especially after the corruption scandals exploded (see chapter 3.3), LN was able to present itself as a liberation movement, not interested in the power games in Rome, but in the people's needs in the North.

The other very popular issue that LN exploited was that one of illegal immigrants, especially from the South. Helped by the media, many people established a link between criminality and the inflow of legal and illegal immigrants. For a number of years, there were a large number of mainly Albanian immigrants (also from Kosovo) landing on the southern shores of the Adriatic sea, often arriving on boats organised by criminal human traffickers. The Albanian population in Italy was made the object of strong attacks from LN. As an example, in 1993, during the electoral campaign for the mayor of Milan, LN came out with a poster saying: "Un voto in piu' alla Lega, un albanese in meno a Milano" - a vote more for the League, an Albanian less in Milan (Lega Nord 1998). Making migrants, especially illegal ones, an 'enemy' of Padania, made the movement popular among many, especially among people with

low education, but also attracted a lot criticism for racist policies and outrage from many organisations.

While migrants were mainly associated with petty criminality, the Mafia was another business altogether. Especially during the first decade of LN's existence, a policy of forced exile for suspects of Mafia connections was enacted by the national government. In many cases, cities in the north were chosen to host them. Moreover, some areas of large cities, especially in Milan, were subject to intimidation episodes similar to the ones that were quite common in cities of Sicily and in some other southern regions. The common fear was that the Mafia would infiltrate the north. To be more precise, the businesses of the Mafia, such as drugs, money laundering, arm trade, etc., had already reach not only the north, but also many other countries in the world. What LN was really more pointing at, was the so-called 'Mafia culture', and its spread in Northern cities. This included the climate of intimidation of local businesses, the fear of Mafia retaliations when denouncing criminal activities, etc. While often present in early LN rhetoric, the Mafia as an enemy has become less and less evident in more recent period, probably due to the changed environment (partial success of the state in the fight against the Mafia, or at least a change of nature of the latter, posing more interest in 'higher' business, and less in 'street' criminality).

Finally, it must be mentioned that Berlusconi and the 'neo-fascist' of Alleanza Nazionale were occasionally made the object of very strong attacks from the leaders of LN. However, these attacks suddenly ceased every time an alliance with these parties was in sight or was made, such as at the time of writing. Instead, significantly less anti-Communist propaganda was made as many actual and potential voters were people with strong Communist pasts. However, the centre-left parties, including the communist ones, were included in the concept of Partitocrazia, as illustrated above.

4.3.3 Gatherings of Pontida and the importance of the River Pó

An open area near Pontida had been chosen by LN to organise occasional gatherings of several thousands of supporters to deliver speeches in moments of success and of difficulty of the movement, either to capitalise on a recent electoral victory or to re-launch the movement in situations of stagnation or loss. It seems that Pontida has become a symbol for many LN's supporters; a place where they can meet others sharing similar feelings and the same social

identity. It is a symbol of the strength of LN as in many occasions these gatherings have attracted a very significant number of people.

Pontida was not chosen by chance. As illustrated below, the first League of northern Italian city-states against the emperor was actually created in Pontida in 1167. The romantic reference to a historical event that presumably brought together people that now LN wants to reunite under a single nation is of great symbolic relevance. Also then, a common enemy, the emperor, was threatening their freedom. Now, it is the Partitocrazia of Rome which was 'oppressing' the free people of the Padania.

Besides the frequent gatherings in Pontida, LN uses the river Pó as a symbol of common riches of the Padanian people. "Padania, derives from Po, Padus, Celtic and Ligurian root that stands for deep river and without bottom. The ancient father of all Padanian people" (Lega Nord 1998). On few occasions, the leader Umberto Bossi, went to the source of the river, filled a carafe of 'pure' water and brought it to Venice, close to the place where the river flows into sea. The Po' is by far the biggest river in Italy (652 Km) and crosses over the Padanian plains from west to east, flowing into the Adriatic Sea. Besides the name, it is probably used as a symbol because it represents one of the natural elements that is common for most regions of Padania and has historically been a source of productivity and life.

4.3.4 Common history: symbol of a common heritage and common destiny?

"In contrast to the Italian State which for 135 years has attempted in vain to define itself as a Nation, Padania represents a potential Nation in historical and cultural terms based on shared feelings and social and economic interests, though still subject to an arrogant colonial repression which now has become intolerable". (Lega Nord 2001)

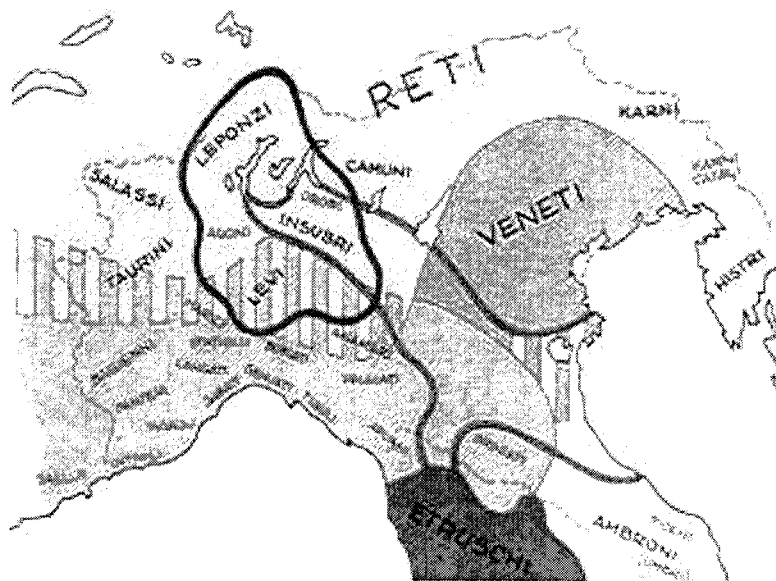
LN certainly has a point in saying that the Italian state has a very short history and even that the nation building process has not been very successful. Similarly, LN has also a point in saying that current history books are unbalanced, highlighting any possible instance of Italian nationhood, and shadowing instances that would counter this view.

However, LN then uses the same methods to present another unbalanced history where Padanian nationhood and the nationhood of its component 'nations' are justified. Here is one

way of how this history can be told.... (The following is quoted from Lega Nord 1998, translation by the author)

The first historical inhabitants of Padania were the Garalditani (the ancestors of the present Basque populations). They were then slowly replaced by the Liguri and other similar populations (the Camuni, the Carni and the Reti) in the western and alpine Padania and by the Veneti in the eastern Padania. As from the 12th century A.C. the so called Golasecca civilisation with clear Celtic features developed in the area around Ticino. The Celtic penetration in Padania occurred through the Alps for long period and there is no record of military confrontations: these were very similar people and their assimilation has been almost a natural thing. The Latin and Greek historians of the time were not able to distinguish one people from the other in terms of customs, culture and physical aspects, but only for their language.

The last big migration (4th and 5th century) brought in the Insubri (guided by Belloveso) that settled in western Lombardy, the Lingoni, the Boi and the Senoni that settled in Emilia, Romagna and Montefeltro. This was the period of the first meeting and fight with Rome that had by then occupied part of the peninsula. The Celts, guided by Brenno, marched towards Rome to punish the assassination of one of their chieftains by a Roman ambassador. They fought a battle on 18 of July of 387 with the enemy army placed on the Allia (a river



flowing into Tevere) and broke them into pieces. They entered Rome and plundered it and left only after receiving a monetary compensation. It was going to be one of the worst traumas for the Romans (the 'Dies alliensis' was to be remembered for centuries as a day of death).

The Romans invented a number of ridiculous stories ('le oche del Campidoglio', Furio Camillo) in trying to transform the defeat into a heroic resistance and in a revenge to come.

*The Celts did not have an imperialistic culture; they conquered lands only for vital necessity. For this reason they did not destroy Rome, something that would have changed (in better) the history and returned to their homes instead. Very different was the Roman arrogant attitude, which lived out of the exploitation of subjugated populations and which had to, in order to survive, continuously expand in their conquests. On the path of blood, the Romans found yet the Padanian Celts, whose resistance was won only thanks to betrayals, corruption, and internal divisions. From the battle of Sentino, in 295 B.C., to the submission of the Leponi della val d'Ossola (100 A.C.) four centuries of wars, guerrilla and active and passive resistance passed. The Liguri, Salassi and Cozii held on the Alpine and Apennines' straits for centuries taking the Romans into bloody ambushes. To this the Romans responded with mass murders, deportations, and systematic destructions. Not even those who had proved to be friends were saved from the Roman violence that occurred in the course of the first century B.C. also on the main cities of Veneto. **There were four centuries of heroism that built the common Padanian consciousness**⁵²: Rome conquered Spain before Milan, Anatolia before Carnia and Piemonte, Cirenaica and France before Aosta, and England before the Alpine valleys.*

After the fall of the Roman Empire, Padania had re-found its political autonomy with the Longobardis that had reunified it under only one political power (with the exception of the Venetian Laguna which had formally remained under the Byzantine rule, but that in reality began to build its glorious history of freedom) and that had revitalised the ancient spirit of local autonomy of Liguri, Celts and Veneti. Padania also inherited from the Longobards the glorious name of Lombardy, term which, for the whole Middle Ages and up till the 18th century, meant all the Padanian valley, Liguria, and Alpine valleys and Tuscany. With the invasion of the Franks and the subsequent historical events, Padania became part of the Roman-Germanic Empire of Federico of Hohenstaufen, called "il barbarossa". Up till then the so-called Italian Kingdom (which included Padania and Tuscany) had enjoyed considerable autonomy, which meant for the cities a regime of almost total freedom. This had allowed the Padanian communities to reach a very high level of social and cultural development and economic prosperity, being the richest region in Europe. The 'Barbarossa' decided to change the tolerant policy of his predecessors and, marching into Padania, requesting payment of high contributions from cities. His intrusion was initially favoured by the usual internal divisions among the Padanians, which 'Barbarossa' smartly encouraged

⁵² My emphasis in bold.

and which led to the destruction of Milan (the most powerful city of Lombardy, but also the first symbolic centre of Padania since the era of the Celts), helped by militias of other Padanian cities.

The sacrifice of Milan increased the imperial claims, but also opened the eyes of all the cities that then understood the need of unity against the true enemy. In 1164, the first Lega Veronese was formed, and then the first Lega Lombarda. The 7th of April of 1167 in the abbey of Pontida, the representatives of Milano, Cremona, Mantova, Bergamo and Brescia sworn to form a federal pact. Later other 20 cities joined from Veneto, Piemonte, Lombardy, Emilia and Romagna. The rediscovered unity immediately yielded results. On 29/5/1176, in Legnano, the League army fought and defeated the imperial army. An important element of that battle was the heroic behaviour of 'La Compagnia delle Morte', a legion of knights led by Alberto da Giussano that defended the Carroccio⁵³.

And the story continues. The third important historical period to which LN assigns much importance is the one of the Venetian republic, 'la serenissima'. Important here is to note how LN makes selective use of history in a similar fashion of that done by the founders of the Italian state and their successors.

If we accept professor Gianfranco Miglio's view, who at one point was considered to be the principal ideologist of LN, that the "Italian nation is a 'myth', constructed by a particular elite in order to press its own advantage and interest" (Haddock 1996:116), then we could by the same token say that LN is constructing its own myth to promote its own interests. Unless, of course, we believe that LN's history is truer than the Italian State's history (the same discourse can be applied the other way around).

Interesting for me to remember that at school I did not study at length the episodes mentioned here, and, when I did, these episodes were presented in a different light, sometimes with the same strong, but opposite, emphasis in some of the passages. For instance, the Romans were always the good, cultured and heroic, and the Celts the bad, when and if referred to separately from the general concept of 'Barbarians'. When I was child these were certainly very

⁵³ *Carroccio was "a large four-wheeled carriage, marked by the city colours, which was the symbol of freedom for the medieval North-Italian communes. During the battles, the Carroccio was placed at the centre of the militia's formation and served for religious functions and as a place of recovery for the wounded" (Lēga Nord - Piemonte 2002)*

appealing stories which undoubtedly contributed, not only for me, in building a certain image of the Italian nation. I imagine that if LN managed to direct history teaching to their target group more in the manner that I have summarised here, their nation building process would be enhanced.

Although I concur that the reliability and success of this historical reconstruction in terms of social acceptance remains debatable, the intention of doing so and the effort put in this enterprise is certainly interesting, seeming to support the case of those who see the past as important for building a nation, although not necessarily building on a true or at least univocal past.

4.3.5 Cultural and physical stereotypes

Following what was discussed in the chapter on culture, it is interesting to examine which cultural and physical stereotypes LN has used as symbols to establish a Padanian identity.

“DNA studies have revealed that in Padania is still dominant the Liguri genetic residual. From the Liguri, Veneti and Celts we have taken the will of freedom, the love for the autonomy, and the hate of any arrogance, the devotion to work, the spirit for sacrifice, but also the happy and adventurous spirit, the taste for arts, the adventure, music and fantastic stories. Religion has brought many elements from the Celtic spiritual universe: the Trinity, the cult for the Virgin and the Saints and the relationship with the Nature. The names of our towns are for the most coming from those ancestors” (Lega Nord 1998)

This statement is taken from a cd-rom produced by LN with the sponsorship of the European Parliament. It is openly sold in public and therefore represents quite an official declaration of difference from the rest of the people living in Italy, not only through a socio-economic explanation, but even a genetic one. It is obviously convincing that populations in the northern Italy have historically had more contact with northern Europeans, whereas in the South there has been more contact with the Arabs. However, as a consequence of the great migration fluxes of the 20th century and the rate of intermarriages after Italian unification, it is now very difficult to make a clear generalisation of the common and distinctive physical traits of a Padanian. And indeed, LN does not insist very much on these points. To the contrary, cultural stereotypes have been much more exploited in LN’s rhetoric.

Italians, as well as many other nations, have been associated with a number of stereotypes which are common knowledge to many, especially in Europe. Just to mention a few, in terms of attitudes, Italians are often stereotyped as funny, or 'not serious', sometimes lazy, attached to their food and to their families (especially to their mothers), good lovers, opera singers, and so on. However, the LN list above does not mention any of these characteristics. Perhaps the interest in arts could be one, but the devotion to work? Or what about the relationship with Nature or the spirit of sacrifice?

In more political documents (Lega Nord 2001, 2002), LN insists on defining the Padanians as hard workers, but also underlines the importance of the nuclear family (and here it is in line with the Italian national stereotypes), liberalism, localism (love for autonomy) and to a strong version of machismo leading to intolerance towards homosexuals and those who are not sufficiently virile.⁵⁴

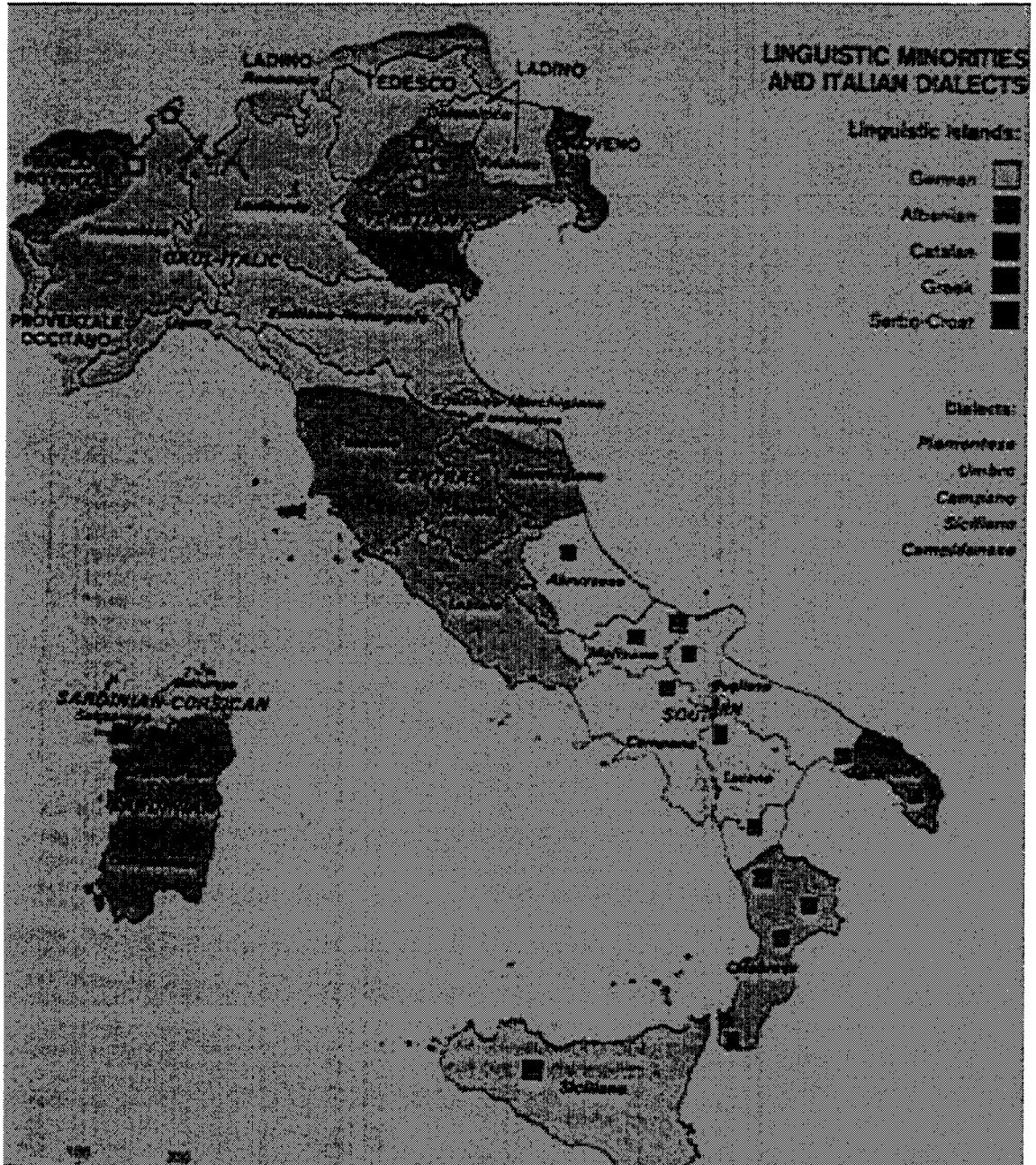
Interestingly, the common language issue has been abandoned after several leagues formed LN. As is visible from the map below, the territory of Padania includes several language groups, which in some cases are as different or more different among them than between a language group of the north and one of the south (and the same applied also between regions of the south). Many in Tyrol speak a form of German, in Valle d'Aosta a form of French and Venetian dialect is quite different from the dialects of Lombardy.

Regarding the language question, LN tries to affirm that a fundamental value of the Padanians is the love for autonomy and therefore the diversity of languages is more than acceptable, and, on the contrary, it should be promoted. However, this applies only to languages and general cultural terms as there is no tolerance for people of different sexual orientation from the dominant stereotype, nor is there tolerance for the 'extracomunitari', that is, people from outside the EU (and, I would add, from rich countries). According to LN, the self-perception of a Padanian ever since the time of the city-states is one of being rich. It seems unacceptable that people from poorer countries should be allowed in Padania, up to the point that LN has been repeatedly accused of being racist.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ 'Celodurismo' is the word coined by the journalist (and now common knowledge in Italy) to describe the rhetoric of LN in terms of machismo.

⁵⁵ See Brierley and Giacometti (1996:187-188) for an account of LN as a racist phenomenon.

In short, LN has tried to define (or 'rediscover') a specific set of national stereotypes and tried to promote them through speeches and media, including among others an EU sponsored cd-rom. LN's set of stereotypes has something, but not much, in common with the Italian stereotypes. This helps to differentiate the identity groups, but also makes it difficult to make them known and accepted.



Linguistic differences in Italy

5 The extent of success of Lega Nord

How do we measure the success of LN or of any nationalist movement? Obviously, one could first take a formalistic approach, which is to examine how far LN's statutory aim has been achieved.

The first article of LN's statute *Lo statuto della Lega Nord per l'Indipendenza della Padania* states that LN "aims to achieve the independence of Padania through democratic means and its international recognition as Federal Republic, independent and sovereign"⁵⁶.

The current reality is quite far from this official declared objective. Padania is still part of Italy and is not even considered a separate region or even given any special status. Moreover, no foreign state has recognised Padania. Having said this, it must be acknowledged that LN has achieved surprising results. Almost 5 million people have voted in a referendum for independence. Already this amount of people would equal a nation as large as Finland, or larger considering that only adults voted. Even if the referendum figures provided by LN were not correct, we know for sure that up to 3,4 million Italian citizens have voted in the election for a party that has never hidden its idea of splitting the country. It has to be assumed that a good number of these voters, if not all, were ready to give up the concept of a unified Italy as one nation.

Besides these considerations and the speculations on the future I have presented in chapter 2.2.3, it is worthwhile to assess LN's success in terms of a nation building process as defined in this paper. Has LN created or increased a sense of collective identity and developed and emphasised a set of national stereotypes among a targeted group of people associated to a named territory? Has LN created or rediscovered a nation? Are the Padanians a nation?

In fact, an answer to this question would be to answer to the general title of this thesis. However, as written in the introduction, this was considered to be more of a rhetorical question allowing for an examination of various issues related to nationalism. However, after having investigated various theoretical problems, I believe it is not an impossible question to answer. If one takes the subjective approach, it is possible to measure the extent of success of a nationalist movement by looking at people's perception through empirical research. It would

be interesting to interview a sample of Padanians and analyse their perceptions; how they perceive Padania and what it means to them. This is something that, for limited resources, could not be included in the scope of this thesis. However, one can speculate on the basis of electoral data. The maximum percentage of votes received in the regions named Padania was 24% in 1996, reaching peaks over 50% in cities such as Varese (69.30% in 1993) or Milano (57% in 1993). As already stated this demonstrates a rather remarkable achievement, considering the relatively short life of this party, as compared to nationalist movements in Catalonia, Basques or Scotland. However, what is more interesting is perhaps the rapid shift of votes from and to LN during a relative short period of time. This is even more surprising as it is likely that many of LN's votes shifted to Forza Italia which, if only for the name, gives a very different impression than Lega Nord.

It is difficult to interpret this shift of votes without the support of an empirical study. At least two interpretations could be possible. On the one hand, the results could demonstrate a weak support and identification with the ideas of LN, painting a picture of an electorate (or part of it) that is voting because of interest or simple protest than real conviction in the idea of an independent Padania. On the other hand, they could show that national feelings can easily and rapidly change especially in this era of fast communication and mass-media.

Still, in any respect, LN has engaged itself in a series of activities that are typical of a nation-building process, similar to those implemented by many other nationalist movements.

Finally, at least as a matter of curiosity, it would be interesting to know the following from the leaders of LN:

- 1) If they were sincere in their claims, that is if their declared aims corresponded to their real aims, or if nationalism was only instrumental.
- 2) If they were aware of implementing a group building process, as an expert trainer would be in a training course or football team, or if the process was just spontaneous. Did Bossi or others study nationalism, social psychology or any other related subjects?
- 3) Why there was never recourse to violence, as many other nationalist movements have done. Was it a choice or due to the circumstances?

⁵⁶ Translation by the author. Original version: "ha per finalita' il conseguimento dell'indipendenza della Padania attraverso metodi democratici e il suo riconoscimento internazionale quale Repubblica Federale indipendente e sovrana" (Lega Nord 2000)

6. Conclusions

6.1 Nations as identity groups: a nation-building centred approach

At the beginning of this paper I offered a short overview of the current debates on nationalism, summarizing the very useful analysis made by scholars, but also showing a large amount of disagreement over a number of main concepts. Particularly, it seems that scholars have spent considerable energy in explaining the historical origins of nations and generally the importance of the past for a nation, however often arriving at disagreement. The approach taken here has been to circumvent this problem while still reaching a working definition of nation and a theoretical framework to explain it.

I have come to realise that the purpose of this definition is related to the ‘common political project’ of all nationalist movements, identified in the nation-building process. Taking this approach has led towards a conceptualisation of nation based on identity. Basically, nations are seen as identity groups, and nothing more. This means that *per se* nations are not to be considered political phenomena, but rather something that can be used for political purposes, namely by nationalist movements, whereby the latter one can broadly include any group of people who engage in a nation-building process.

Besides placing the question of identity as central, I have given a specific and less common meaning to culture, which has shaped the definition of nation itself. I have argued that only individuals interact, cultures do not. **A culture, intended in a scientific sense, cannot be associated to a specific group if a minimalist approach is taken.** On the contrary, a maximalist approach leads to **stereotyping that can be used instrumentally for nationalistic purposes.** However, by definition, stereotypes are not an accurate manifestation of reality, but rather simplifications that may be used as symbols.

Besides what I defined as **national stereotypes** (cultural and physical traits), other symbols can be created in order to reinforce a group identity, or a nation. The case of LN has indicated that the **past** is used instrumentally by both the Italian and the Padanian nationalists. Beyond the question of an actual truthful past, I suggested that the past **should be treated as a symbol**, similar to many other symbols such as the flag or values. **History cannot belong to an actual group of individuals, but only to a stereotyped or artificial group.** Depending on which group one selects, one can build around, or select, a specific portion of history.

Given that people usually belong to many identity groups as well as the fact that they switch between the groups, it is fair to say that history is just a symbol of identity to a group, at least for the purposes of justifying the existence of a nation.

Adopting a model of nation as an identity group offers a number of advantages. I have already mentioned the advantage of avoiding the problem of agreeing on the origins of nations. Another important advantage is the possibility of using concepts and methodologies of disciplines such as education, social psychology and training, to assess and predict the behaviour of nations, or would-be nations by examining the environment, the main actors (nationalist movement, etc.) and the group building process. The instrumental use of nations, as could be the case of LN, is comparable to the instrumental use of group building done in a football team, or in a classroom by experienced trainers or teachers. While conducting this study, I have recognised my limitations in not knowing certain disciplines (for example social psychology) but have relied on my opportunities in having worked with intercultural training and education. This is an argument for a more interdisciplinary approach to the study of nations.

6.2 What do we learn from the Lega Nord example

LN is an example of a nationalist movement that so far has proved only partially successful in reaching its declared goals. Still it has followed a pattern, the nation building process, with considerable accuracy, creating a number of national symbols, using nationalist rhetoric and implementing a number of actions that can easily be seen as exploiting the existing environment in an attempt to promote nation building, particularly the formation of a Padanian nation. LN has operated in an environment that was at the same time favourable and hostile. On the one hand, LN found itself in a period of time when Italy, and the whole world, if we consider the end of the cold war, was going through dramatic political changes, affecting existing social identities. Moreover, the major economic divide and the existing cultural stereotypes provided fertile ground to promote a Padanian identity. On the other hand, the political changes also brought new players who in their turn took advantage of the environment and promoted the opposite, or at least, different social identities than LN. Particularly important was obviously the case of the media tycoon, Silvio Berlusconi and his entrance into politics with a party, 'Forza Italia', whose very name was the antithesis of Lega Nord. However, LN did try to implement a nation-building process and to a certain extent

obtained a considerable amount of support, gaining control of several northern cities, most notably Milan.

What is interesting about LN is its relative success in comparison to its rather short life. It is an example of a movement capable of implementing an effective nation-building process in a relatively short time without recourse to violence. LN actually created an embryo of a Padanian nation. Although smaller forms of territorial identities did exist for some time in the past and at present (city level and sometimes regional level), the Padanian identity is something really created for a purpose. Comparisons to other nationalist movements can be drawn and may highlight significant differences as well as important similarities. In any case, LN has indeed engaged in nation-building and has to be considered a nationalist movement *tout-court*. Although it is possible to argue that the economic factor, that is the envisaged economic advantage for the north, was the main motivating factor, it is not possible to deny that elements completely alien to that were used, namely nationalistic propaganda. Why did not LN just say: "Let's get independent, and we'll get richer"? Why did LN also advocate a common history and other identity symbols?

In this paper, the real motives of LN cannot be profoundly examined, nor whether or not the motives correspond to the statutory aim of the party. However, if nations are taken as identity groups, it can be argued that even if the nation-building process were only instrumental, and not an aim in itself, it is a powerful instrument. People need social identities. If one manages to create a group identity that then can be used for political purposes, then his or her aims can be achieved more easily. Otherwise it is difficult to explain how Bossi and the few people around him could with little resources, reach such a level of support in such a short time. No party, with the exclusion of Berlusconi's Forza Italia (whose resources are enormous, and media coverage in Italy exaggerated), has ever managed this in Italy after the period subsequent to the Second World War.

To sum up, there are two general considerations that are worth emphasising in LN's case. One which was just mentioned above, that is, the effectiveness of using nationalist propaganda to gain support even in well established and wealthy democratic countries, such as Italy. Secondly, the speed in which national identification can change. We have seen how LN rapidly gained support and rapidly lost it. As said, this paper can not measure LN's support at the level of the perception of the people, but only support based on electoral data. However, to

that extent this paper supports Hobsbawm theory (1992) and perhaps gives some feedback to his request for more research on the topic. I have provided some reflections that may help in building a theoretical framework for empirical research based on people's perceptions, those people who are a target of a nationalist movement in its nation-building process. It could be interesting to look at a nation (as target groups of nationalist group) at a certain point of time and then follow its development at another point of time analyzing this period in terms of nation building and changes in the environment. Finally, it would be also interesting to see whether this framework works in a comparative study of other nationalist movements, to see whether measurements and data comparisons are possible.

6.3 Speculations on the future of nations

It is clear that there can be a state without a nation and there can be a nation without a state. It is usually said that nationalist projects aim to combine these two. Why? It is not only ideology. If we see nations as identity groups, running a country with a strong identity clearly brings a number of advantages, some of which are very obvious: higher solidarity among the members, higher resistance against external threats, etc. In other words, it is easier to govern such a country. It is also a question of legitimacy in western countries. Since the time when it became commonly accepted that power resides with people (as opposed to God, or its delegates), it also became easier to associate this concept with a group of people sharing a common identity.

Given these advantages, I would assume that nations, as objects of nationalist movements, are likely to continue to exist in the near future, with possibly a faster pace in the creation of new nations, reinforcing or destroying old ones, due to the faster means of communication. Perhaps in the long term, the relation with territory will change, as territory progressively loses economic importance. This could provide an opportunity to reduce the negative effects that nationalism has often produced, such as territorial wars. Other ways to reduce these effects is to try adopting symbols of identity that allow an easy way in and out of the group. Stereotyping, particularly referred to physical traits, are those that may create more problems for people to join or leave a group. For instance, at present a person of black skin would have serious problems being accepted as a member of the German nation. This easily leads to cases of xenophobia and racism. Another important measure can be taken by educational establishments. Culture should be approached with a minimalist view to avoid the risk of taking stereotypes for unchangeable truth, and in order to understand nations accordingly.

Nationalism can be used in a positive way. *Per se*, it is not a bad idea as nationalism may strengthen solidarity among a certain population and can lead to more democratic societies. However, nationalism can be used as a very dangerous weapon by certain nationalist movements. It can be used to invade a foreign country on the belief that it is part of their nation's land (see Nazi Germany, Milosevic's Serbia), or it can be used to subjugate part of the resident population on the belief that they are not, and will never be, part of a given nation (see Sharon's Israel, pre-Mandela's South Africa). Until we find a different and better way, it is important to keep studying nationalism, not only for the sake of intellectual interest, but also with an eye to contribute to the improvement of society as large.

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Annex 1: Examples of modern definitions of Nation

Nation refers to a relatively large group of genetically unrelated people with high solidarity.
(Hechter 2000)

A named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and memories, a mass, public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members.
(Smith)

Nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.
(Stalin, 1912)

A daily plebiscite.
(Renan, 1882)

A large social group integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical) and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness.
(Hroch 1996)

An imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.
(Anderson 1991)

A nation is a far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity. Formed from one or more ethnicities, and normally identified by a literature of its own, it possesses or claims the right to political identity and autonomy as a people, together with the control of specific territory, comparable to that of biblical Israel and of other independent entities in a world thought of as one of nation-states
(Hastings 1997)

Annex 2: Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of Padania⁵⁷

We, the Peoples of Padania,
gathered together along the great river Po from Emilia and Friuli, from Liguria, Lombardia,
and the Marche, from Piemonte, Romagna, and Sudtirolo-Alto Adige, from Toscana, Trentino,
and Umbria, from Valle d'Aosta, the Veneto, and Venezia Giulia,
united today, 15th September 1996, in Constitutional Convention, affirm and declare:

When in the course in human events it becomes necessary for one Peoples to dissolve the
bands which bind them with another, to establish themselves as an independent and sovereign
community, and to assume the role assigned to them by the Natural Law of Self-
Determination among the nations of the Earth, respect for International Society and all of
humanity requires that they should declare the reasons which impel them to the separation.

Since time immemorial, we live, we build, we work, we protect, we love these lands handed
down to us by our forbearers, bathed and quenched by the waters of our great rivers;
Here we have invented an original way of living, of developing the arts, and of working;
We belong to a historical area, Padania, which is strongly integrated socially and
economically, though in recognition of the due respect for the diversity of the Peoples of
which it is comprised;

These lands are united by the ties which run as deep as the enduring cycles of the seasons
revolving about them, as strong as the spirit of freedom of the Peoples that inhabit them;
We, therefore, constitute a natural, cultural, social, and economic community founded on
shared values, culture, and history, and on harmonious social, moral, and economic
conditions;

Padania is our pride, our precious resource, and our only chance for freely and fully
expressing our individual natures and our feeling of community;
In contrast, the history of the Italian State has become the history of colonial oppression, of
economic exploitation, and of moral violence;

The Italian State has, over time, systematically occupied Padania's economic and social
system through its parasitic bureaucratic apparatus;
The Italian State has systematically annihilated every form of autonomy and self-government
of our Towns, our Provinces, and our Regions;

The Italian State has jeopardized the freedom of the future generations of Padania, destroying
enormous resources on fraudulent policies, on welfarism, on the vote-pandering system, and
on criminal enterprises which have irreversibly led Italy down the path to bankruptcy;
The Italian State has deceptively forced the Peoples of Padania to be subjected to systematic
exploitation of their economic and financial resources, built up through years of tireless daily
work, to squander them on devastating welfarism, the vote-pandering system, and mafia-style
corruption in the South;

The Italian State has deliberately attempted to suppress the languages and the cultural
identities of the Peoples of Padania through the colonization of the public education system;
The Italian State has imposed its unfair laws on the Peoples of Padania through a judicial
system applied with racist criteria;

⁵⁷ Lega Nord Piemonte (2002) and Lega Nord (2001).

The Italian State has sought to dominate the Peoples of Padania by assigning the tasks and functions of public order and safety to Roman-style prefects and law enforcement officers applying the most hateful forms of Statist colonialism;
The Italian State has appropriated the constituent powers of the Peoples of Padania and has been deaf to ever-growing cries of protest;

For these reasons

We are profoundly convinced that the continued presence of Padania within the confines of the Italian State would lead to gradual extinction of all hope of rebirth and the annihilation of the identities of its Peoples;

We are aware that a free and independent Padania will become a political and institutional focal point for the construction of a Europe of the Regions and of the Peoples;
We are convinced that a free and independent Padania will guarantee a decisive contribution to cooperation and tolerance and to peace among the Peoples of the Earth;
We, united here today, represent the last hope that the oppressive Rome-based regime can come to a rapid conclusion;

We, the Peoples of Padania

Since the courage and the faith of those who have come before us in the struggle for the freedom of Peoples are our guiding light which must lead us to irrevocably take charge of our own destiny;

Since we want our acts to be guided by the respect we owe to ourselves, to our forebearers, and to our children;

Since we recognize the unalienable sovereign power of all Peoples to freely decide with whom to be, how and by whom they should be governed;

Since we affirm our right and our will to assume the full powers of a State, to levy and collect all taxes, vote all laws, and sign all treaties;

Since Padania will be all women and men who inhabit it, who recognize it, and since we are those Peoples;

Since the hour has finally arrived to set forth on the great enterprise of giving birth to this new Country which we baptize today with the name Padania;

In the name and with the authority which derives to us from the Natural Law of Self-Determination and from our free conscience;

Calling in the name of our free Institutions the teachings of love for liberty and the courage of our Padanian forbearers as witnesses to the honesty of our intentions

We, the Peoples of Padania solemnly proclaim:

PADANIA IS
AN INDEPENDENT AND SOVEREIGN
FEDERAL REPUBLIC

In support of this Declaration we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour.